

THE STARRY POOL  
AND OTHER TALES

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FOR REVIEW

THE STARRY POOL, AND OTHER TALES



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# THE STARRY POOL

## AND OTHER TALES

BY

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## PREFATORY NOTE

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S. G. TALLENTS.

LONDON, April 1918.



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# THE STARRY POOL, AND OTHER TALES

## FRENCH SOLDIERS

IN the days of my childhood, when the tide of battle swept across the nursery floor, I numbered among my army a troop of French cuirassiers. Their lot was a hard one; for when they were not engaged in holding against overwhelming numbers of English a most vulnerable fort, presented to me by a civilian uncle, it fell to them to charge—a forlorn hope—against a square of Seaforth Highlanders, who awaited them with a grim Highland smile set eternally upon their faces and bayonets held perpetually at the engage. Their fort was invariably taken, their charge invariably broken; but in the repeated hours of their defeat I came to regard them with an affection of which,

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holding the views I then held on the subject of patriotism, I could not but be a little ashamed.

Crossing some years later in the respectable company of an uncle and aunt to Calais, I saw my first French soldier in the flesh. He was dawdling along the railway line in Calais station : a red-trousered figure, picturesque, but, to the eye of one accustomed to the stern parades of the nursery, untidy in his dress and in his bearing. True that in Paris I saw real cuirassiers at last, their horsehair plumes nodding about their helmets and their swords rattling as they walked. The picture of the soldier in Calais station stuck uneasily in my mind, and I doubted in my heart whether all could really be well with the armies of France.

But the first time I ever spoke to a French soldier was at Grenoble. I had gone there to spend the autumn, partly as a holiday, partly to learn French ; and someone introduced me to Jacques. He had been brought up in a school of all nationalities at Lucerne, where English boys had taught him to play football. Now, with forty or fifty others, he was an élève-officier in the school at Grenoble, and he had made it his ambition to get up a football team that should carry the fame of Dauphiné through

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the clubs of Lyons and Marseilles. If we could but defeat the latter, it was certain, he said, that we should be invited by the students at Milan to go down and play against them. He had played there once—for the Racing Club de France, I think—and he whetted our ambitions with stories of how the Milan clubs paid all your expenses and met you at the station and accompanied you to your hotel with a band.

He carried me off with him to a café, where he and his friends used to meet of an evening ; and then and there we formed an Association team to play under the auspices of the Stade Grenoblois ; and then and there he called for pen and paper and indited a challenge to the premier club of Lyons.

We spent the following evenings in enlisting our team. Not more than half of them had ever played football before, and we prepared them for our great adventure by simple lectures on the rules and traditions of the game. But our challenge remained unanswered. Jacques, therefore, again seized a pen and wrote what seemed to me at the time the model of a terse and haughty challenge. We were ‘fortement surpris,’ I remember it said, at receiving no answer to our letter, and could only suppose

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that their courtesy in not answering concealed a reluctance to test their fortunes against ours. In reply we received a somewhat disdainful acceptance of our challenge, the match to be played at Lyons a fortnight thereafter.

During that fortnight we became regular subscribers to *Le Lyons Sport*, a paper which we bought for a sou, and in which we hoped to detect signs of our opponents' form. We were surprised, about a week before the match, to find an announcement of it, with a statement to the effect that an 'équipe' largely composed of Americans and Belgians was expected to represent the Stade Grenoblois on the following Sunday at Lyons. We prepared ourselves grimly to wipe out this reproach.

The day came, and soon after dawn we collected outside the railway station with a view to securing the reduction of fares granted to those who travel as a team. We were a strange party. Jacques himself, in the uniform of the 'Chasseurs Alpins,' carried the football, and at his heels came a medley of soldiers, some wearing the képi, in long tunics and red trousers, others in the blue béri and uniform of the mountain regiments. At the last moment we found that the goalkeeper had failed us. His sub-

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stitute was clearly too stupid to learn anything from lectures. We therefore sent him into the corridor of the train with one of the half-backs, instructing the latter to throw the ball at him throughout the journey, so that he might at least take the field not wholly unprepared for what was expected of him.

The game itself stands out vividly in my mind. It was contested in the ‘Ancien Vélodrome’—a gravelly arena surrounded by a derelict cycle tract. The ‘gate’ consisted of one soldier and three immature civilians. Jacques surveyed them haughtily, and remarked to me that there would be a very different state of affairs when we had won a few matches and established our reputation. There was some difficulty in securing a referee, but eventually, although we were loth to reduce the crowd of spectators still further, the soldier was prevailed upon to handle the whistle.

Of the first half of the game there is little to record. Neither side scored, and at the end of forty-five minutes the teams retired from the field to refresh themselves with liqueurs, while each of our leading opponents grouped himself in turn in front of the two remaining spectators and submitted himself to a photo-

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grapher who had in the meantime appeared upon the ground. After a pause of about ten minutes the game was resumed. Excitement now ran high. Furious kicking took the place of passing. There were loud shouts—‘En avant ! en avant !’ ‘Au dessus de lui !’ ‘Off-side !’ One of our opponents accused the referee of insulting him, and the latter threw down his whistle and left the field; but a more tactful opponent at length prevailed on him to return, and after five minutes of warm discussion the game was resumed. At length Jacques, the hope of the Stade Grenoblois, scored. There were ten minutes still to go, and our opponents came at us like furies. The gravel flew in all directions beneath their frenzied kicks. But the honour of Grenoble was in our keeping, and sternly and silently we pressed them back and pinned them to their end of the ground, till the referee, for very shame, was at last forced to blow the whistle for ‘time.’

Our return journey to Grenoble that evening was one combined recital by us all of the parts which we had played. Even the goalkeeper was still felling his opponents by twos and by threes in the gravel of the ‘Ancien Vélodrome,’ when the train drew up after a three hours’

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journey at Grenoble. We dispersed homeward in the darkness. But the final seal of our triumph was to come. At our café the following evening we drew up a brief account of the game, setting forth how on the preceding Sunday at Lyons eleven heroes, of pure French blood and incomparable skill, had trampled upon a team mainly composed of Swiss and Portuguese. The form shown by all members of the 'équipe' augured well, we added, for the future fortunes of the town. This report duly appeared in the *Petit Dauphinois*, and we sent off a copy to the club we had defeated.

That is how I first came to meet French soldiers. I had a second meeting with them, by the ruined estaminet on the Béthune-La Bassée road, where the lines of our country joined theirs in January 1915.

## THE RETURN

ONCE, long ago, I started off from Nice, in the evening about tea-time, in a slow train for Marseilles and the North. In the train were soldiers of France. My carriage was packed with them, all coming back to Marseilles from Christmas leave on the Italian frontier. All of them had pig's-meat of some kind, and all of them flasks of Chianti, narrow-necked glass bottles covered with straw. As we steamed slowly through the tunnels into Marseilles, man after man drained the last remaining drops from his flask and then dashed it through the carriage window against the wall of the tunnel with a cry of 'O sale ville ! O sale ville !' As the last one jumped up to hurl his bottle out into the darkness I caught his arm and asked him to give it to me instead. I carried it back safely to England in my rucksack, and the sight of it has ever since recalled that bitter cry of disgust to my ears.

•      •      •      •      •

## THE RETURN

It was twelve months ago last January that I met French soldiers again. It was my first night in trenches, and I was sitting just behind the firing line, digging my chin into a goatskin jacket that I wore under my Burberry, and thinking unhappily of England. I was beginning to feel cold, when a man came along the firing line just in front and turned down towards me. He was the subaltern, it appeared, in charge of the trench, and he sat down for a moment opposite me and told me that his men were on the right of all the English line in France, and that where I could make out by the light of flares a broken row of poplars was the road that divided the two armies. Beside it, he said, a few days ago the French had caught a German creeping up an old trench with a bomb. He had got within two yards of the sentry, and then, a second before he threw the bomb, had been shot through the head. I went along next day to see him. A sentry was standing at a barricade with a levelled rifle and his finger on the trigger. He bade me peep over the barricade. I looked up and saw within a few feet the body of a huge German lying on his face with arms outstretched and a bomb still clutched in one of his hands.

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They showed me a note-book they had taken from his pocket. His name, if I remember, was Karl Luck, and he lived in the Artillerie-strasse, Berlin. He must have been a brave fellow.

But all this happened on the following day, and that night it was that I renewed my acquaintance with the soldiers of France. The subaltern told me that he had sentries posted in a house of which I could dimly trace the outline. He suggested that, as I might have to put a post there on the morrow, I should go with him to visit it. We pushed our way down the firing line together, past what I recognised by daylight as a barricade across the La Bassée road. At the farther end of it a sergeant was crouching under the wall of the house. I sat down beside him and questioned him about the post. The building, he told me, was not held by day. But by night they posted a couple of sentries in it, one to watch the road, and especially a ditch that ran beside it, the other to overlook some seventy yards of dead ground—an orchard that lay between the French left and a ruined mill in front of them. With this explanation he led me up into the inn itself.

## THE RETURN

The side-walk that faced the Germans was practically shot away, but by standing close into the corner one could contrive to be under cover. The sentry lay behind a heap of bricks on the floor, and there was just room to lie down beside him and talk. Both armies were very restless in front of Cuinchy that winter, and bullets were crackling and whistling round the walls of the estaminet, every now and then striking sparks from the brickwork. We were safe as long as we kept under cover, and most of the shots, as generally happens at night, were flying high. But although I had a taste later on of what machine-gun fire means in the open, I was never in a place where bullets joined in a wilder or more dramatic dance of death than they did about the skeleton inn on the La Bassée road that January night. I questioned the sentry who was watching the ditch by the road, and then I crawled over and lay down by his companion on the other side of the house. I looked across the orchard to the old mill, and back again to the French line. A crackle of rapid fire burst out at that moment, and I watched the flashes of French rifles stabbing the darkness. I lay there for a time fascinated by the strange sight, and then crawled back

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over the débris of shattered brick to the gap in the wall through which I had climbed up.

As I rejoined the sergeant, a man came along the barricade to where we were sitting. The sergeant explained that this was a Frenchman who came at intervals to throw a bomb into the orchard. He passed us silently and mounted to the gap in the wall. He crossed the floor to the post which I had just left, and then, standing up for a moment against the sky, gathered his strength and hurled his bomb. With just that motion, years before, fellows of his had hurled their flasks of Chianti against the walls of the tunnel outside Marseilles ; and as the bomb burst with a flash in the orchard, and the man who had thrown it climbed down again chuckling into the trench, I knew by a sure token that my old comradeship was renewed.

## IN SUPPORT

IT was my platoon who first told me that we were 'for it,' having heard all about it from the townsfolk of Béthune. They knew the date of our advance exactly, so we had quite a week's warning. The night before it was due we were even told officially that great things were afoot on the morrow; and in the darkness of the early morning our battalion paraded in the road. It was the day of Neuve Chapelle.

We marched through the streets, close beneath the great church tower, and came to the canal. We marched on until, somewhere beyond Beuvry, we came to a wood where they had been cutting the undergrowth and felling trees. Company by company we turned aside into the clearings, halted, dressed, and piled arms. Then we called our platoons together and read the General's message to them.

There were faggots lying about, and we allowed the men to make a couple of subdued

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fires. Meantime the bombardment, which had been growling away on our left as we marched out from Béthune, swelled to an intense and almost continuous roar, punctuated by the reports of a battery firing on the other side of the wood. I left my platoon and made my way back to the road. There was a cottage there, and I went into the kitchen and sat down. A number of officers were already in the room, and two peasant women were sitting close by the fire. I spoke to one of them. She was a refugee. Her husband had not been heard of since the first month of the war. She herself had lived for a while in a town occupied by the Germans. Then they burnt her home and destroyed everything else she possessed ; and she, by some strange pilgrimage, had found her way to the cottage where now she was living.

I went out into the road again to see if any more news had come through. A young officer, galloping for some general, came trotting back from the canal. We stopped him and asked him what was happening. To the north, he said, we had broken through the German line and advanced about a mile. The Indians were doing splendidly. There was no news from our

## IN SUPPORT

immediate front. He drew his horse clear of our limbers and trotted away down the road. We went off to our platoons and told them the good news. Presently the same galloper passed and repassed again. To the north we were still advancing. In front of us the Germans had held up our attack. It was to be repeated in the afternoon. We went back into the cottage, and the women helped us to spread our lunch.

All that afternoon we waited about the road. My company was due to be called on first, and I expected every moment the order to move up into the trenches and get ready to charge. The noise of the guns swelled again, rose to an intense bombardment, and again sank. But to us came neither news nor orders.

Some of the men were kicking a football about among themselves. Some were playing pitch-and-toss in a circle. From the road one could see their faces upturned as the coin spun into the air, downturned as it fell. Others were sitting round the fire, talking or sleeping. One was playing on the concertina which my platoon had subscribed together to buy. I had noticed it on parade in the street that morning, and advised the man who carried it to leave it in safe keeping at Béthune. He had evidently

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passed it on to a comrade, and I caught snatches of ‘Barney O’ and ‘The Wearin’ of the Green.’

At last orders came down for company commanders to mount and go forward with the commanding officer. It was nearly dark as I saw them disappear over the canal. I went back to my platoon, put on my goatskin coat under my Burberry, lay down by a bundle of faggots and dozed. Shortly before midnight the order came to move. I led my platoon out on to the road, and halted just short of the canal. We were the leading platoon of the battalion that night. We waited till the other companies had formed up in rear of us, and then led on across the canal bridge and up the towpath on the farther side. It was pitch dark. A mile in front of us the flares were soaring and sinking. Gusts of rapid fire were sweeping along the trenches. We were ordered to halt, and the men knelt down on the towpath, the butts of their rifles on the ground and the muzzles just visible against the sky. The order came to advance. We crossed the canal once more and moved in single file up a track with pollards running down one side of it. Their gnarled shapes stood out against the flares. Once again we were halted. A bullet swished by and buried

## IN SUPPORT

itself in the ground a few yards away from me. A moment later another whistled overhead. My men muttered together in the darkness. We moved on again, stumbling over the uneven track, dragging against telephone wires, checking where a narrow bridge crossed a stream. Suddenly Givenchy loomed ahead, and we were in the village street, with skeletons of houses to right and left. The bullets were cracking about them, now and again striking sparks from the brickwork. In one doorway there was a glimmer of light, and we could see enough to picture a cellar full of wounded men. Then suddenly we turned to the left out of the street and dropped into a trench. It led along under a wall, past a hedge, till we came to a breastwork. There an officer met me, and told me, as we moved slowly down the firing line, in tragic and disjointed sentences the fate of his battalion.

I groped my way along the trench, showing my electric torch under cover of my hand. Morning alone disclosed the full horror of it—the filth, the blood, the shattered breastwork, the abandoned greatcoats, the derelict rifles and equipment. Morning alone showed the line of khaki dead, spilt and tumbled against the pitiless line of German wire. But the glimmer

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of my torch that night showed dead men lying in the passages of the trench, showed wounded men patiently waiting for the stretcher-bearers, who were too hard pressed back in the village to come out for them. The living men had seen before dark their comrades lying out in the grass, and had themselves been expecting hour by hour the order to cross the parapet and charge.

As I came to the first man I called to him to make way. He asked me who we were, and I told him. I never heard a more moving sound than the echo of my answer, as it passed from mouth to mouth ahead of us into the darkness :

*'The Guards! The Guards!'*

## THE HELMET

ON Easter Sunday of 1915 we were in trenches in front of Givenchy ; and that afternoon I called for Keogh, a man in my platoon with the eye of a hunter, who always knew twice as much of what was going on in the German trenches as anyone else in the battalion. Keogh came, and we went out together to a listening post about thirty yards in front of the firing line, where a man stood watching an old communication trench that ran straight up to the German lines. We had found it originally, Keogh and I, one evening when we were looking for a place for a corporal and a man to lie out in. We had slipped over the parapet, crept through the hedge, and found ourselves a couple of feet short of a dark mass that lay almost submerged in the water of a derelict trench—only just distinguishable by the light of a flare as the body of a man. We reported the existence of this trench, and the battalion that came to relieve us ran out a

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sap to it and covered over the dead man with a barricade, behind which, day and night, a sentry watched with levelled rifle.

On Easter Sunday, therefore, Keogh and I came along to inspect this trench again. It was a hot, sunny day, and very few shots were passing to and fro. There was long grass in the field between the two lines, and here and there, where it grew longest and darkest, I could make out through my periscope a patch of grey uniform. We talked to the corporal in charge of the post. Their orders were, he said, to fire up the old trench all night at intervals of five to ten minutes, and once they had thought they heard a man creeping up to them along the hedge. But no answering shots seemed to come their way—only an occasional ricochet from the sloping meadow on the right; and although, looking up the old trench, one saw the white sandbags of the German parapet ahead, for some reason which I have never quite understood the trench was evidently not under their observation.

As we stood there talking, Keogh swung himself suddenly over the barricade into the old trench, and started off towards the German lines. He went about fifty yards, crouching so that he could not be seen from either side, and we saw

## THE HELMET

him groping about where a branch twisted down from the hedgerow hid the rest of the trench from us. Presently he came back carrying a bugle, which he had taken from round the shoulders of a dead German. When we had scraped the mud off it, we found that it was an English bugle, made in Liverpool, and it was slung on the plum and yellow cord that marks a 'royal' regiment. I can only imagine what strange medley of fighting to and fro about Givenchy left it hanging round that dead German's shoulders. Keogh told me that there was a group of German dead lying behind the twisted branch, and that you could see the marks beside them where German patrols passed through the hedge.

Three days later Keogh came and told me that he had explored the trench again, and that this time he had found the marks of hob-nails in the very floor of the trench. The Brigadier was particularly anxious about this time to find out what regiment was in the trenches opposite, and I had no difficulty in getting leave to sit out all night on the chance of catching a German patrol. Keogh chose a third to keep us company—a tall, reserved man, doomed to be killed instantly a month later by a bullet in the forehead that caught him as we scampered

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out in the dusk across a desolate field by the Rue du Bois. It was almost dark—between seven and eight—when we slipped out again into the old trench and made our way cautiously up to the place where the branch was bent across it. Keogh and I found a cut in the side, and scooped it out with his entrenching tool to make cover and a seat for the pair of us. The other man found a similar cut some ten yards behind us, and settled down there to prevent our being surprised from that direction. We ran a piece of derelict telephone wire between us and communicated by means of jerks.

Sitting there, not much more than fifty yards from the German parapet, we watched all night. Now and then a flare soared across overhead and threw into relief the tattered hedge that ran in front of us. Once there was a burst of rapid fire Festubert way, and we could see a cluster of flares in the distance jumping up into the sky and sinking again—bobbing, I remember thinking at the time, like the old woman's bundle of airballs at the gate of Kensington Gardens. We could hear the faint thud of a trench-mortar as the bomb was discharged—a sound that no one who has heard it will ever forget; we could see the glow of

## THE HELMET

its fuse as it travelled through the air, and then came the flash as it exploded beyond the rise of the meadow behind us. A light fog came on. Once I thought I had a glimpse of someone moving in the meadow, and roused Keogh, who was almost dozing over his rifle and bayonet. But together we decided that it was nothing, and settled down again to our vigil.

By two in the morning I had made up my mind that no one was coming our way that night ; and, telling Keogh to stay where he was, I started to move up the old trench towards the German firing line. I stepped carefully over a dead man, only to find three more lying ahead of me. Moreover, the sides of the trench gave way as I clutched them and pieces fell with a splash into the water by my feet. So I pulled myself out of the trench and worked sideways on a line parallel to the German wire. Some thirty yards on I came upon another dead man lying in the grass ; and as I reached him a flare shot up from the German trench almost exactly ahead. I lay down by him, my shoulder by his head, while the light travelled across and all the shadows moved round me. It showed up the German wire and the sandbags of the German parapet not far in front ;

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and I pressed my chin into the sodden grass, wondering if by any ill-fortune a sentry had observed me. But the light sank and died away, and no shot came. So I lifted my chin again and put my hand out to the dead man's head and felt his helmet, and wondered who he had been and what strange chance it was that had made him and me for that brief space of time comrades. I dragged away his helmet and brought it back into our lines just before dawn.

The eagle from his helmet bore the names of Mesa de Ibor, Medellin, and La Belle Alliance. His regiment—it was a regiment of Nassau—must have fought in the Peninsula under Laval, have crossed the ravine of Mesa de Ibor in the teeth of the Spaniards and driven them out from the heights beyond at the point of the bayonet. It must have supported the French cavalry that broke and massacred the Spanish line a fortnight later at Medellin. It must have fought with Blücher at Waterloo. But what of the man who was my companion that evening? He never saw Medellin or marched with Blücher towards La Belle Alliance. There are hard fights ahead of his regiment before it comes to add the names of French villages to Medellin and

## THE HELMET

Waterloo; and it may be that, if he could have foreseen the future, he would not have been so ill content to fall where I came on him, flung like an outpost on to the Givenchy meadows with the frontiers of Germany leagues behind. The spike and the badge of his helmet are beside me. A bullet has grazed the eagle's wing and bent back the scroll that reads 'La Belle Alliance.' I often wonder if, in some small town of Prussia, there are those who still watch for the glint of that eagle as it turns the corner of the street.

## IN HOSPITAL

IT was after nine weeks of hospital and five operations that the surgeons ceased to frown upon my wounds and I began to get better. I have seen plenty of accounts of what it feels like to be taken to hospital, but none that seemed to me to catch the special joy of coming gradually back to life after a severe wound. There is the relief from anxiety, and there is the sense of growing strength as one passes from bed to wheeled chair, from chair at last to crutches. But the greatest discovery to me was the pleasure to be got from simply lying still and watching the ordinary ebb and flow of hospital life. Watching generally makes me restless with the sense of other things to do and time on the wing. But when all ambitions are reduced to the single desire to get well, and all duties to the single necessity of doing nothing, then it is wonderful to discover what a treasure life bestows on those who merely watch it. For me, at least, those

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last two months of inactivity in hospital gave a new meaning to the familiar promise about the meek inheriting the earth.

Sometimes, of course, there was an unexpected adventure. One day, for example, we were told that the King and Queen were coming to the hospital. The patients put on their finery and arranged their pillows. The nurses flew about the wards. But later we heard that the rumour came only from a photographer who had rung up the hospital and asked for the exclusive rights of photographing the Royal Party as they arrived. I do not know if he arrived to enjoy his rights, but I do know that the King and Queen did not. Then there were the zep-pelins. I was awakened one evening not long before midnight by the sound of guns close at hand and the distant thud of bombs. I shared a room with one companion then. He lay close by the window, and I remember how weirdly his eyes glittered with the reflection of the searchlights. I had not heard the guns since the morning I was wounded, when I watched our shells plough round a French farm-house, while the earth and smoke and brick-dust spouted up in mottled columns. Then I had been waiting in a shallow trench for the word to lead my

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company out against a wrecked farm. But this night in London I could only lie still in bed and watch the flashes of the guns in the distance, and wonder where the bombs were falling, till the flashes ceased and the firing died away and a little group of nurses stood outside our window and chaffed each other for hurrying out of bed.

But generally life moved by with an almost ceremonial regularity. The pigeons were always with us. At the first sign of a crumb they would come fluttering down from a ledge high up on the hospital, and then would be off again, wheeling round the great plane-tree, at the sound of a door slammed inside the wards. They generally went about in two parties, as it were—the Government and the Opposition—an arrangement they had no doubt learned in Palace Yard, just across the river. There was a fringe of unhappy birds that sometimes went with the Government and sometimes with the Opposition, wherever at the moment there seemed the greatest likelihood of crumbs; and occasionally they would make a Coalition Government for a while, and surround my bed in one apparently harmonious flock. Bravery among them seemed to go with redness; at least, the bravest of them was a fine, red-coloured fellow who was always

## IN HOSPITAL

the first to eat out of my hand and the last to fly away. And next to him in bravery came his red-coloured son.

Then there were one's friends and the friends of one's fellows. Relations take on a different colour when one is helpless. Cousins, whom before I had only known through the opaque medium of dinner-parties, took on individual and delightful colours when they came and talked to me in the sunshine of a leisurely afternoon in hospital. Brother officers came, too, with news of the battalion abroad; and friends, whom I had not seen since Oxford days, come back—some of them from overseas—to the lure of the trenches. The threads of a life which I had thought never to recover began to weave themselves together in a half-familiar pattern. And while I was talking to my own people I would watch the friends that gathered round the other beds in the garden—the demonstrative young wife, happily impervious to the smiles of the demurer folk about her; the little daughter of an appendicitis case, appealing to her father's nurse for an introduction to one of the genuinely wounded; the reserved mothers and sisters bearing flowers and fruit. Sometimes, too, there would be a knot of anxious relatives clustering

## THE STARRY POOL

together on the grass or walking restlessly up and down till the surgeon came out of the theatre and told them the result of an operation. So the visiting hours went by and ended ; and those of us who were well enough to sit out in the open air gathered in a group and read the evening papers and exchanged the last stories of spies, till one by one we were called in to get back to bed and be ready for supper.

We lay in our beds with little to distinguish us outwardly beyond the irregular patterns of our temperature charts. But in reality we were a various company. There was my room-companion who had won the Military Cross for gallantry in going out to look after a wounded man. There was a boy whose leg had been shattered in a charge upon a village where for seven weeks I myself had been in and out of trenches. That night the Germans took him prisoner, but in the morning his brigade charged again, and found him desperately wounded in the shelter of a ruined house. There was an old officer, long past his fighting days, full of Indian stories about regiments swept away on the march by cholera and of famous bygone leaders of cavalry whose grandsons had fought with us in France. There was a manufacturer from the Midlands who

## IN HOSPITAL

would describe to us how the operation from which he was recovering had relieved him from the tyranny of his local doctor and a ten years' belief that his case was incurable. There was a man whose knee a lion had torn in Africa and the surgeons in long months of patient work had slowly mended again.

Friends passed on again each day into the outer world. Patients were healed of their wounds and infirmities. But beneath the changing surface the unceasing ritual of the life went on. The house-surgeons, in their white jackets, strolled across from ward to ward. The nurses and the probationers went to and fro. The V.A.D.'s came hurrying in to their spell of duty, went leisurely out to their spell of rest. As the morning drew on, surgeons in khaki drove up in their motors, got out, and disappeared into the hospital. The masseuses, dressed in their distinctive brown, and carrying overalls on their arms, crossed the court on their way to work. Last of all came the new class of probationers. I was sitting in my wheeled chair one day, drawn close into the alyssum border, when a fleet of taxis in quick succession drew up at the door of the nurses' home. From each a mother and daughter alighted. Next morning

## THE STARRY POOL

and several times a day for many days thereafter a procession passed our window, the girls that were going to be nurses, marshalled two and two, and hurrying across the quadrangle with the sternest of 'sisters' following in their wake. I got my discharge about ten days after they arrived; and I dare say that by now the discipline of the hospital has settled down on them and that they could not be distinguished from any of the others that wear the probationers' mauve and white. But when I came away there was still in the gaiety and variousness of their procession something that flashed about the dark walls of the hospital like a challenge and a provocation to escape.

## BAMBURGH SANDS

JUST twenty weeks ago I was lying in a base hospital in France, coming round after an operation. I had been hit three days before, shot through the thigh from a farm quite five hundred yards away, as I ran across the open from one trench to another to warn my company for a charge. The wound had proved to be badly poisoned ; and that night, as I lay in the ward with the taste of ether in my throat and the scent of ether in my nostrils, the surgeon came round to me.

‘ You’ve a very nasty leg,’ he said. ‘ I don’t think there’s any danger to your life, but the next two days are critical and will show whether we can avoid amputation or not. You’ve a companion in misfortune,’ he added, ‘ but he’s an elderly man, and we’re practically certain to have to amputate in his case.’

‘ Will he be all right ? ’ I asked.

‘ No ; I’m afraid he’ll die,’ said the surgeon.

## THE STARRY POOL

I felt a certain compassion for the old man who was to have his leg cut off and to die. I cared surprisingly little whether they cut off my leg or not. It seemed chiefly a question of what they would feel about it at home. But I was feverish, and the excitement of that last rainy night in the open had not yet left me. I had shouted, they told me, under the anæsthetic ; had called out to someone to keep on working. Evidently I had been back again, beyond the long train journey, beyond the scene in the hospital at Béthune, where a whole room had been full of men stripped under the surgeons' hands, in that muddy field which I had tramped the whole night long, kicking drowsy men into wakefulness and urging them to dig on and on, to scrape away with their entrenching tools, because otherwise at daybreak they would certainly be blown to pieces.

I was feverish and I was excited and I was very hot. The rest of the ward had their supper, and gradually the talking stopped, and at last the lights were put out. The sister came and injected morphia into my arm ; but that night the morphia brought me neither painlessness nor sleep. I had to lie there on my back and keep rigidly still for fear of disturbing the leg

## BAMBURGH SANDS

slung in a wire splint in front of me. I kept drinking the lemonade by my bedside, but increasingly the heat tormented me.

I tried the various devices of Wordsworth's sonnet for getting myself to sleep. I pictured to myself a scene which for some reason generally sends me off—a steeplechase, in which rider after rider in an endless field comes downhill to a hedge, rises to the jump, clears it, and is gone. But still the torment of the heat continued.

Then I imagined that I was on the beach of Holy Island, and that two fishermen were coming down from the hill by the Priory to put me across to the beacons, where in old days they used to light fires to mark the channel. I got into their boat, and they rowed for a while, and then hoisted a sail which took us flying across. As we went, I could see the shallow flood-tide scurrying over the sandy bottom and dragging broken strips of seaweed with it. Then I jumped out between two quick waves on to the sand below the beacons, and I said good-bye to the two fishermen and started to walk to Bamburgh.

The tide was still far out ; there must have been nearly a quarter of a mile of sand between

## THE STARRY POOL

the edge of the sea and that wonderful and desolate piece of country known as Ross Links. I took off my shoes and stockings and tramped steadily on. The lines of seaweed and drift-wood ran beside me, marking the extreme reach of the tide ; and once or twice I stopped to hunt for cowries in the patches of broken coal and gravel. I came to where the ribs of a fishing-boat lay half buried in the sand, and sat on one of her beams and recalled the story of her—how she had been stolen by a man in Scotland and in revenge had drowned him and his mate on that desolate coast one stormy night of March. As I sat there, I marked a flight of widgeon out at sea, a sprinkling of black dots on the water, that presently rose and wheeled together back towards Holy Island. I could hear the gulls ahead of me screaming over their food in the estuary, and a heron came sailing across the sky with slowly flapping wings.

I got up again and went on. There were partridges calling behind the dunes on my right ; but I knew without turning aside what it was all like—first the deep sand hollows and the rushes, then patches of grass and bracken and heather intermingled, and, beyond, the coast-guard's house and the farm sheltered in its

## BAMBURGH SANDS

cluster of trees. So at length I rounded the edge of the dunes and came within sight of the Waren River and the white cottages opposite the ford. It was getting dark, and lights were showing in their windows, as I crossed the flats and came to the edge of the tide.

You may cross there two hours before and two hours after low water, but at other times you must go up-stream and get out on to the road by the bridge. It was full high for crossing that evening, but I determined that I would not go round by Waren Mill. So I plunged into the water, and as it rose deeper and deeper and still deeper about my knees, I fell asleep.

To-day I hobbled fifty yards on crutches, and, standing by the old Castle Mill, saw far away under a grey sky the fringe of white sea and yellow sand that runs along the edge of the dunes. Beyond were the two beacons, the dark line of Holy Island, and the dark blur of its castle—a magic island, always to be gained by the sure of foot in half a day's walking, but to me this autumn a fairyland unattainably distant.

## THE GUNS

LAST night I was in Kent ; and as I was walking after dinner up and down the paved garden path, where the tiger lilies grow on the right hand and roses on the left, suddenly, for the first time in fifteen months, I heard the guns again.

There was a golden moon hanging beside the oak-tree. The blue of the larkspurs was losing itself in the twilight, and to westward you could still trace in the elms the magic green of trees seen in the dark against a rain-cleared sky. All these things I saw, for I recalled them afterwards ; but my mind was far away, beyond that Kentish garden, beyond the Kentish hopfields and the Kentish seas, thinking of those that would never see the morning.

I remembered the first time that death had crossed my path—how, returning late one night to barracks, I had been told that a friend by whose side I had hoped to fight in France had

## THE GUNS

been shot dead in the dark as he clambered out of a trench at Ypres. But it had come nearer to me on a January evening, when I got out of the train at a little station a few miles behind the firing line and there met me in the station yard, coming suddenly out of the winter darkness, stretcher upon stretcher, a procession of stricken men.

I remembered my earliest meeting with death itself—how, the first night I was in the trenches, I was shown across a barricade a huddled patch of grey not two yards from me that was a German bomber lying dead. Passing down a trench held by another battalion next morning, I came where a boy lay by the trench side with his face covered. They were waiting for the night, so that his comrades might bury him ; and later, from a small wooden cross set up over his grave, I learned his company and his name. It was the day on which I lost the first man killed in my platoon. We were on the right of all the English line in France, pouring in rapid fire upon the German trench opposite while others raided the Cuinchy brickfields. I was walking up and down the line, seeing to it that rifles were not jamming and that every man was firing his hardest, when they brought

## THE STARRY POOL

me word that a boy in my platoon was badly hit. I went along the trench, but already death was closing in upon him. They buried him later in the cemetery behind Cuinchy, where lie a host of those who have fallen about the Béthune-La Bassée road.

I remembered, one long winter's afternoon, working in relays by the selfsame road to build up the end of a trench, while a dead Coldstreamer, resting against a poplar-tree, watched us at our labours with unseeing eyes. The night before a patrol had lain out round him, and there had been a dispute between the platoon sergeant and the corporal in charge as to whether there were five men in the patrol or four. But by then I had become familiar with death. Several times, out between the trenches at night, I had had to lie down beside the dead while a German flare sailed slowly over; once already—in the 'Duck's Bill' at Givenchy—a man had been killed standing by my side. All this the sound of the guns brought back to me last night, as I sat in that Kentish garden and watched the green of the elms fade into blackness against the western sky.

Back in the villages death is a horrible thing. Walking one day along the canal below Givenchy,

## THE GUNS

I came on a moored punt in which a knot of workmen, who had been repairing the towpath, were standing round what seemed like men asleep. These were the bodies of three French boys who had chanced on an unexploded shell, and had started in their curiosity to examine it. Two of them, I believe, were brothers from the same home in Beuvry. And this was, I knew, but a token of far more terrible things seen by those who fought in Belgium in the first autumn of the war.

Back, too, in the ambulances and the hospitals death, no doubt, may be horrible. And yet I suspect that there the real horror belongs to life rather than to death. For weeks a brother officer of my own battled with death in the hospital where I myself was lying. In the end death prevailed, but not the horror of death. I was sitting in the hospital garden for the first time on the day of his funeral. They carried him slowly out of the chapel, his coffin heaped with flowers. French and English soldiers presented arms as he passed—slowly out of the chapel into the sunlight, and then slowly through the sunlight out of our view.

But those who go up to the trenches know

## THE STARRY POOL

that death is the hazard of the contest in which they are engaged. They love life with a passion unknown to those who possess it in security ; but the fear of death is the forfeit of that security, and of that forfeit they are free. I think that if in death their spirits could cry out they might ask a better fortune for those who must take their places, a longer space of living for those they have left behind. I do not think they would ask for pity. And for their bodies—surely those who fall in and beyond the trenches, more truly than the lover in the poem, ‘lie as lads would choose.’ There is none of the pomp and dreadfulness of a funeral about their passing. It may be that their fellows bury them. I remember a small wooden cross behind our trench at Givenchy inscribed ‘To an unknown comrade.’ It was not a hundred yards from the German trenches, but the grave which it marked was seldom without a sprinkling of blossom from one of those garden corners in the village where the flowers still persisted in growing. I remember also two small crosses behind the village, close by a wrecked German limber that lay with its shell baskets still about it, on which it was only possible to read the opening words of the inscription—‘*Ci git.*’

## THE GUNS

Those graves, too, we decorated with flowers  
in the spring of last year.

And what of those who fall where no man  
can give them burial ? They may lie for a  
time amid the squalor and destruction of the  
trenches ; for a while may seem even in death  
to have found for their bodies no repose. Yet  
their heads at length the passing seasons veil  
about with the lengthening grasses, and for  
them—

We have no need of names and epitaphs ;  
We talk about the dead by our firesides.

## THE FRIENDLY HOUSE

I WAS on the brink of getting a house when war broke out ; but the war stopped me, and ever since I have been in the tantalising, but in some ways attractive, position of looking for a house without any very practical intention of taking one till the war ends and I know certainly that I shall not be going back to the trenches.

At first my search was fantastic. There was a wharf for sale in Chelsea, and I thought I might get myself adopted by some wealthy folk and buy the wharf and build a wonderful house upon it, with a private gondola and a private pair of black swans. But that was several years ago, and no one has yet shown signs of adopting me ; and even if such a stroke of fortune came my way, I should consider rather buying part of a house in Adelphi Terrace. For I imagine I should have to wait to buy a whole one till my adopted parents died.

But the wharf, as I have said, was a fantasy ;

## THE FRIENDLY HOUSE

and while I was playing with the idea of it, and long before I really had need of a home of my own at all, I was measuring the possibilities of an old house in Wapping and occasionally casting an envious eye on the Craft School in Stepney Green. Its iron gate, with the monogram which is said to be Royal, and its staircase lured me. And then it had a mulberry-tree in its garden, and mulberries always went straight to my heart. Only a month or two ago I nearly hired a house that was twice too big for me, and quite three times too uncomfortable, for the sake of its mulberry-tree.

But it was Bridget who stayed me then ; and Bridget who banished the fantasy of the wharf and the lure of Wapping. Partly at least it was Bridget and partly the little Bridget, whom her mother calls Persis, but I Cuinchy, because I was close to the Cuinchy brickfields just at the time when she was born, and saw the red brick-dust fly up in clouds to heaven the day the Irish Guards broke in among the Germans and Michael O'Leary won his V.C. I remember sitting in the trenches just by the Béthune-La Bassée road and studying the map for names, and hitting on Violaine. But her mother would have neither Violaine nor Cuinchy, just as she

## THE STARRY POOL

would have neither the wharf nor Wapping. My wound, too, sobered me; and when next I came to look for houses in London, it was in the more obvious quarters of Bloomsbury and Hampstead and Chelsea and Campden Hill that I sought a furnished house to shelter our little family, till the war should have declared whether I was to be passed for the trenches again.

It was in this way that I realised first the tyranny of London houses. Almost every house I saw was clearly master of the situation. The browbeaten tenants were obviously longing to cast away the chains of their houses from them. I could read in their faces the history of the battle, a struggle in which they had replied to the rigid hostility of their houses by accumulating munitions in the shape of excessive quantities of ornaments and furniture. If the war has made anything plain it is the truth of the story in which machines got the better of men. I have seen it in Flanders, where every great gun has its horde of attendants stretching back to the sea, waiting ready to satisfy its lightest whim. I have seen it in Whitehall, where men sit helplessly, while the machinery of laws and regulations and returns which they have set in motion has clearly outstripped their control. And I found

## THE FRIENDLY HOUSE

just the same phenomenon when I came to look for houses in London. Theirs had been a quieter rebellion, but it was clear that the houses had beaten the men.

I was forced to take a furnished house that had defeated its owner, but I measured my strength against it first, and decided that it was a more benevolent despot than most houses, and that I could hold my own for a year. So I settled down in it, and determined, before that year was up, to find a house that should be to Bridget and Cuinchy and me a friend instead of a master.

The rest of my story must be told very guardedly. I think that I have found the friendly house of which I dreamed. But it is important that my house should not recognise itself in what I am going to write, for it might use that knowledge to establish a tyranny; and it is important that no one else should recognise it and forestall me.

It stands upon the hills over London, and is at present a league of three houses and not one house at all. London tumbles about below them. You look down on roofs, as though it were an Italian town tossed about the spurs of the hill; and on a clear day from their upper windows

## THE STARRY POOL

you can see beyond St. Paul's, beyond the hanging smoke of London, to the North Downs and Ranmore Common. Each little house has a garden, and each of these gardens is different from the other. In one are flowers, and in another are chickens and pigeons and vegetables, and in the third is nothing but weeds. From this I argue that if the three gardens were made into one there is nothing that would not grow and flourish in them.

The same is true of the three little houses. But I dare not tell you more of them at present. For they are not yet mine; and if you found them out it may be that their present owner would take a fancy to you and sell you my three little houses. And then I might have for ever to live in South Kensington instead.

## THE FESTIVAL

THE nursery in our new house will undoubtedly be the noblest of all the nurseries in London, and that because of a bearded man, a friend of mine and an architect. For one evening, as we were showing him over the house, we took him into the room which is to be the nursery, and waited to hear him say how spacious was the floor, how wide the windows, and how unlimited the view. But instead—‘This,’ said he, ‘is the room for which I have been looking, ever since I was a bearded man and an architect. For I have a friend, a poor man but an artist, who is greatly given to the carving at top speed of bears, ducks, moose, hunters, cherubs, and other such small deer, which, having perfected in his own private cellar, he disposes of from the kerb of a street in the smoky city of London. For, as I have already said, though an artist, he is a poor man. No one than he can express a flowery tale more sweetly ; and therefore let us convey

## THE STARRY POOL

to him two, or maybe three, boards of deal, well seasoned and without knots, and let us encourage him with praise and the promise of some small reward to carve at top speed as many cherubs, hunters, moose, ducks, bears, and other such small deer as shall go to the manufacture of a dado for your nursery.' Whereupon Bridget clapped her hands and said that so it should be, and that the little Cuinchy should thus have a nursery like no other child, rich or poor, in the length and breadth of England.

Now we were sitting over the fire last night, imagining together all the creatures that should be carved by this poor artist upon the deal boards wherewith we had hastened to provide him, when Bridget said :

' We must have a festival to celebrate the beginning of our life in this new house, and the completion of that flowery tale upon its walls.'

' A festival ! ' said I. ' And what kind of a festival ? ' I said.

' You must invent,' said Bridget, ' a festival appropriate to our means and to the wintry season of the year.'

' I can remember,' said I, ' only one festival taking place in the month of October; and

## THE FESTIVAL

that was in a hermitage of St. John, far up in the mountains overlooking Spain. All the people of the neighbouring villages, men and women and children, climbed up that evening to the hermitage in readiness for the Feast of the Rosary. They and I together that night gathered round the hearth in the great kitchen, nor was any other light in the room but that of the blazing fire. And as those Spanish people conversed together, hoping for their dinner to be cooked, and I could converse but little, having no knowledge of the Spanish tongue, suddenly the priest rose up and began to march up and down, reciting a most holy grace in the Latin tongue. And thereat the talk was stilled, and we sat with the firelight flickering upon our faces, watching the flames that leapt upward from the logs, listening to the mutterings of the priest and to the bubblings of the soup in the cauldrons, and from time to time ourselves chanting the refrain of that ancient and unending grace. All of which was indeed but a prelude to the Feast of the Rosary. But that was a Spanish and a mountain festival, held while the snow was lying already on the upper slopes, but before it had closed for the winter about the walls of the hermitage. I never heard that those who

## THE STARRY POOL

change their houses in London celebrate their passing with so splendid a feast.'

'On that point,' said Bridget, 'I, too, am uncertain, and will to-morrow inquire of the house agents.'

'Why should we not adapt,' said I, 'to our own purposes the ritual which I have described? Let us summon to our feast all the friends of the little Cuinchy—Margaret and Betty and Roger and Torvald and the twins, Primrose and her sister, and the boy whose godfather was an admiral lost in the North Sea. Only for that long Latin grace Margaret shall say but a short one in English. And when tea is ended, what shall we do? We will not romp, for romping consorts ill with a festival; and still less will we play a thinking game, for such games no one would play except in escape from something worse. But we will play an orderly and a decorous game, and in particular we will engage in that beautiful and ancient dance called "Oranges and Lemons." We will move up and down the drawing-room and we will sing:

Oranges and lemons,  
The bells of St. Clement's,  
'I owe you five farthings,'  
Say the bells of St. Martin's.

## THE FESTIVAL

So we will go on singing, till we come to that verse which says :

Here comes a candle to light you to bed,  
And here comes a chopper to chop off your head.

And at that all the guests will say they must be going ; and we will help them put on their coats and their shawls, and will open the front door and will let them out with their nurses one by one into the dark October evening, saying good night to Margaret and Betty and Roger, and good night to Torvald, and good night to Primrose and her sister ; and, last of all, we will say good night to the boy whose godfather was an admiral lost in the North Sea.

‘ But when they are all gone, then you and I and the little Cuinchy will complete our festival together. We will take each of us a taper and we will go from room to room in our house, singing the song of Golly ; the little Cuinchy in her light treble voice, and you in your deep alto, and I in my own curious manner of singing. We will start in the kitchen, and I dare say that there cook and Rachel and Nanny will join in our procession. We will go all through the house, and last of all we will come to the nursery. And as we go round that room, there will be a wonderful thing happen ; for with the

## THE STARRY POOL

voice of our singing and the flickering of our tapers all the creatures upon the wall will come to life. The bears will be prowling and the ducks flighting, and the hunters will be chasing the moose, and all the cherubs and the other small deer will be moving and dancing along the wall. Once, twice, and thrice we will circle the nursery table ; and then, having come to a break in our song, and our tapers being well-nigh consumed, we will pass into the night nursery. And there we will put the little Cuinchy to sleep in her wooden bed with cane sides, for a token that our song is ended and our festival complete.'

Then said Bridget : ' Of all the feasts I ever met, this will be the seemliest, the happiest, and the best.'

## THE WINDOW

BRIDGET and I were going over our new house. This is not, indeed, those three little houses on the hills overlooking London, of which I once told you—of them a richer man contemplates the buying. But if our house stands on a lesser hill than they, yet its hill is taller than any that ever I saw in Flanders, and its garden contains a copper beech and a convolvulus.

Our house was as yet unfurnished; and when we had climbed up to the topmost storey, we placed an empty packing-case in front of the window and sat down side by side and looked out.

‘This,’ said I, ‘is a good house.’

But Bridget, looking out across the roofs and observing how the smoke was rising from them all:

‘I would it were in the country,’ she said.

‘Hush !’ said I, looking round apprehensively; for I feared lest our house might be

## THE STARRY POOL

listening to what she was saying, and might suspect that we were mere sojourners there. Now to sojourners a house never unlocks its heart.

'No one need be afraid,' said Bridget wisely, 'of speaking favourably of the country in a top storey. For the basement and the first floor and the second floor of a house are indeed slaves to the town. But I have often remarked that the nursery and the top floor are always trying to look out into the country, whither all good men and houses would wish to escape, and are, as it were, but hostages in London. And especially is this true of nurseries which are decorated, as is ours, with a wallpaper of the orange tulip pattern.'

With that Bridget drew her end of the wooden box a little closer to the window, and, resting her elbow on the sill and her chin in her hand, she spoke of the kind of house which one day she would have.

'It will be,' she said, 'a house of grey stone, not over large, but with a wing coming forward on either hand, and between the wings a pavement of great stones with tufts of lavender growing among them. It will have that kind of porch in which you must turn to one side

## THE WINDOW

to enter the door ; but all the while you are walking up to it from the gate, you see by two windows right through the house and into the garden beyond.'

'I saw a house like that once,' said I, 'in the Cotswolds, when I went to spend Christmas there and to walk the hills alone.'

'Inside the door,' Bridget went on, 'will be a hall with a chimney-corner wide enough to hold four guests at least besides ourselves, and plenty of bright china on the dresser from which to eat and drink. There will be a window-seat at the farther side of this hall, where often I shall sit of a morning and watch the garden and give thanks for the blueness of the lark-spurs and the whiteness of the lilies that will grow together in my border.'

'I remember,' said I, 'when I was a yeoman, halting once, and all my troop behind me, to look at just such a garden from a road below the Sussex Downs. Perhaps I told you of that adventure.'

'It was,' said Bridget, 'my own idea. Upstairs,' she went on, 'the bedrooms will have curtains worked with red daisies, and in the morning I shall run to the window and pull them apart and look out upon almost all

## THE STARRY POOL

the hills of England. The sea, too, will not be far away. But you shall choose what kind of sea it shall be, and shall tell me. For you know the different kinds of sea better than I.'

'Perhaps,' said I, 'it will be that sort of sea which on a windy day turns green and casts before it upon the beach a barrier of driven foam, which for ever the wind blows landwards but the sea for ever renews. And behind is the gleaming margin of the sand, changing every moment from steel to blue and from blue to steel with the changing aspects of the sky.'

'You are very good,' said Bridget, 'at imagining the sea. Undoubtedly our guests will gladly walk out of an evening to view such a sight as that. And then, with the wind still blowing about their faces, they will come home, bearing with them a ship's timber or some pieces of sea-coal wherewith to make a fire. And after supper they will light that fire and will sit round looking at it; and I shall say that I will sing to them, and you will offer to read one of your tales. But which they will choose I cannot say, nor does it greatly matter; for they will be thinking neither of your tale nor of my song, but of the things that they see in the fire and of sleep.'

## THE WINDOW

‘So at length you will set out the candles in a row, and we shall go up again to that room where in the morning I pulled aside the curtains and saw almost all the hills of England. But now I shall see only on some evenings clouds, and on other evenings the moon and the stars, and once a year on every one of those hills an orange point of flame that I shall know for a beacon lit in memory of peace. And on that night you and I will sit up watching all those beacons; and you will tell me stories about Cuinchy and Givenchy and the Rue de Bois, and we will talk together of that dear lad, our friend, whom only last week death stole from us in France.’

It was nearly dark by the time that Bridget had finished this story. So we got up from our wooden box and went downstairs through the silent house, and let ourselves out of the front door like traitors, and walked away, side by side, down the street.

## THE TOWN CHILD

CUINCHY, our baby, was sick; and Bridget and I were sitting by the window in our nursery, talking together in low voices and from time to time stealing across to see that she was still sleeping in her wooden bed with cane sides. Bridget had just been over to her, and, sitting down again in front of me, she sighed, seeing all the chimney-pots outside the window, and—

‘Poor Cuinchy will be a town child,’ she said.

‘I wonder,’ said I, also looking out of the window, ‘if that will greatly matter.’

‘Of course it will,’ said Bridget.

‘I am not so sure,’ said I, ‘but let us not argue about it in short sentences. Let us rather have a contest, in which I will first praise the town for children, and then you the country, or, if you wish, it shall be in the reverse order.’

‘For myself,’ said Bridget, ‘when I look back on my own life, I hold it a great mis-

## THE TOWN CHILD

fortune for a child to be brought up in the town. In the first place, it is a sad thing to be brought up in a house in which there are no spare rooms and no hiding-places. Now in a town house (except perhaps the very rich town houses, and they have so many other disadvantages) there are no spare rooms, and the only place in which you can hide is among the cisterns in the roof. But in the country there is always a room where no one will look for you, and where you can find a picture-book to pass away the whole of the afternoon. Then there is the garden. In very hot weather we would run after the peacock butterflies or the red admirals that settled on the dahlias in the border, and then sit and rest on the moss under the big beech-tree. And in moderate weather we used to play in the wood, sweeping up the leaves or visiting the secret pit that you had to push through the brambles to find. And in cold weather we used to play at hunters round the holly hedge and along the paths that ran between the border and the apricot-trees. And in freezing weather we used to skate on a pond with the coachman's children. Each of us had a private rose-bush, and I had one of those fiery-coloured flowers that children call red-hot poker. We had a

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donkey between us, that we used to harness all by ourselves to a wooden cart, and drive out on the common to get loads of firewood or bracken. And we had a white dog to run behind our cart and to bark at the gipsies on the common. No one can think how happy we were. And, therefore,' said Bridget, 'I hold with that Frenchman, who wrote a whole book to make his niece understand how important it was that her children should spend the greater part of their time on a farm.'

'When I was a child,' said I, 'my brother and I would be dressed like hussars, in long red coats, and on either side of our governess would go for a walk in Hyde Park. Of animals I knew no more than I learned by observation of the sheep that used to eat the dusty grass outside Knightsbridge Barracks; of flowers I knew only the chestnut which fell about the paths in Kensington Gardens; of butterflies I knew only the currant moth, having captured one in our nursery.

'Yet to me and to my brother, dressed like hussars in long red coats and on either side of our governess, those walks were strangely quickening to the soul. And when I grew up I began to frequent the society of those who

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had been educated in the country, hoping to hear from them of other sheep than that sheep, more beautiful flowers than that flower, more lovely moths than that moth. In this hope I often led them to walk the country with me on Sundays—greatly to my disappointment. For I found that, when I spoke to them about woodpeckers, they answered me with talk of politics and economy, and when I pointed to the Persian willow-herb they did but the more thrust their heads forward and quicken their steps towards the train which should take them back to London.

‘I have been told that the finest virtue flourishes among people who lead a hard life in the mountains ; and I have observed that to the Jews Palestine appeared most beautiful not when they were living upon the hill of Zion, but when for the first time, emerging from the wilderness, they saw it spread before their eyes, and again when as captives by the waters of Babylon they sat down and wept. May it not be that those persons, who as children can only imagine the country, have in the end the truest and most beautiful ideas about it ? And may not this be the reason why those men whose society I frequented, when I spoke

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to them about woodpeckers and pointed to the Persian willow-herb, cared for none of those things ? You yourself, Bridget, tell me stories of all that you did when you were a country child ; and it is true that you do not talk to me about economy and politics, nor thrust your head forward when you walk. And yet I cannot but see that all that life of yours was, as it were, a fog of happiness, and that you have no such pictures as I have of the country, as I saw it when at last I wandered there as a man. Out of all those days in which you played about the garden and the wood and the common, you have no such evening in your soul as that on which I stood upon a hill above the Thames and saw spread out before me all the rivers and the hills of the beautiful county of Oxford, and beyond them the orange sunset of a winter's night, heavy with snow ; nor any night such as that on which I rode a ghostly horse along the ridges of the great plain, and heard the clicking bits of other ghostly horsemen, following me through the mist. I doubt,' said I, 'whether you are even a lover of the blackberry flower.'

'The blackberry is a common white flower,' said Bridget. 'People who live in the country

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have many more beautiful flowers to look at—such as roses among the garden flowers, and honeysuckle among the wild.'

'The blackberry,' said I, 'is indeed a common flower, but it has five white petals and a misty green heart, and there is no flower more beautiful.'

'You always make,' said Bridget, 'the worse appear the better cause.' And with that she got up and went across the room to where Cuinchy was lying in her wooden bed with cane sides, for our baby had moaned in her sleep.

There was a jug of white pinks on the mantelpiece, and Bridget took one of them and pushed its cool green stalk into Cuinchy's little hand, that lay hot and clenched upon the counterpane. 'I wish that you may be a country child,' she said softly, and stole out of the room on tip-toe. Nor could I, following, at heart dissent from her desire.

## THE ADVENTURER

IN certain moods Bridget pictures herself as a bright spirit snatched by me from the garden of the Hesperides and now doomed to tread for ever the kitchen garden paths of ordinary life ; nor would anyone wholly fail to see the justice of her complaint who knew her, as I did, in days when her crimson scarf flashed across the heather, or on nights when her starry dress went swaying and gleaming through the ballrooms of London. And yet, since it is not good for man or woman to give way to melancholy, I attack this conception, wherever found, either with hopeful imaginings of her own future or with brilliant pictures of the past which I myself forfeited in order to give her a habitation and a name.

The other evening, when we were sitting in the garden after dinner, I took this second course of immediate counter-attack. It had been a hot, oppressive day ; and Bridget, never noticing the little breeze that was at last stirring in

## THE ADVENTURER

and out among the seed-pods of our laburnum, said tragically :

‘ I see that there are no more adventures ahead of us at all. To you, perhaps, that does not make much difference. But to me——’

Whereupon I, laughing at her forlornness :

‘ And why, Bridget,’ I said, ‘ do you suppose that adventures have never come my way ? On the contrary,’ said I, ‘ my life, though to you it appears to contain but one great adventure, wherein an observant German pulled his trigger and lodged a bullet in my leg, has in truth been one long series of hazards and surprises, beside which this incident of the German is hardly worthy to be counted an adventure at all.’

This reflection I cast like a may-fly into the stream of Bridget’s thoughts, and checked for a moment the running line of my speech. The tug of her answer came quickly.

‘ Why do you always talk nonsense in sunny weather ? ’ said Bridget to me.

‘ Nonsense, indeed ! ’ said I, and set the reel of my thoughts spinning. ‘ There was hardly an hour before the war but adventures thronged my path. Have I never told you of the boy whose father was killed in the mountains by brigands, and he, still weeping for his father, met me, as

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I was journeying with two Spanish merchants, friends of mine, along the straight and dusty road of the Cerdagne ? Have I never described to you how those two men fought with broken tumblers on the hard high road below Berwick, till a fisherboy and I dragged them apart, all dusty and bloody ; and how the elder of them met me one night on the Great North Road (close by the wood where Lady Grizel Cochrane shot the messenger that carried her lover's doom in his pocket) and pressed me, in his gratitude, to drink wine with him, and then disappeared into the darkness with his poacher greyhounds at his heels ? In all the days I spent in Flanders I never saw so fearful a fight as that.'

I looked sideways at Bridget for a space long enough to assure myself that she was pretending not to listen but was in truth no little excited by my tale.

'I will not mention,' said I, 'that afternoon on which a Russian barque from Riga, well laden with timber, all but sank my boat off the coast of Devonshire ; how I looked up to see the great stern of her darkly rising and falling above my sail, and presently, having pushed away, saw looking down at me from her deck the white oppressed faces of the Russians that were her

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crew. I will not now pause to tell you fully the tale of that innkeeper in Corsica who, at rumour of our arrival, begged, like Brother Juniper in the story, several large pots, and got fresh meat and salted fowls and eggs and herbs, and put them all on the fire, the fowls with their feathers on and the eggs in their shells, maintaining, like the saint, that the fowls were strengthening to the brain and that the stew would refresh the body. Nor will I digress in order to describe to you how once I helped a man drive a cow to a fair in the Pyrenees, and slept that night in an inn upon a table, with Spaniards upon other tables around me, and dogs nosing about among us all through the night ; or how next day I passed on with my companion, the cow having been profitably disposed of, to a monastery where the priest bade me rest in a four-posted bed that was reserved for the archbishop, in a room with red flowers painted in a most holy manner on the wall.

‘ It was not of these things I was thinking,’ said I, ‘ when I said that mine had been a life of adventure. For these either happened in foreign parts, or on the sea outside England, or on a road so near to Scotland as to make nothing a surprise. I was thinking rather of adventures

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that befell me in England herself. I was reflecting how once I made a vow to walk all day and all night, and, finishing at dawn the seventieth mile, stood and watched the rising of the sun behind Bredon Hill across a country dotted with trees that reached out to the Cotswolds. I was remembering how once I lay on a bundle of grass, a mile out on the sands of Northumberland, listening to the roaring of the tide and watching till I saw a flight of widgeon beating up against the gale between me and the pale sky, and fired and killed two of them. I was recalling how once from the rocks in Yorkshire, about the time of daylight, I saw a multitudinous army of silver fish passing by my feet in silence through the green sea-water—the little fish first, then the greater ones, and last of all the greatest, their pursuers, plunging and tumbling on the surface of the sea, while the gulls hovered and dipped and screamed overhead.

‘With such adventures, Bridget, my earlier life was packed; and do you suppose that, if that stranger of whom we sometimes speak should leave me by his testament his castle and his wealth, I shall settle down and resign myself and you and the little Cuinchy to comfort and to ease? I shall follow rather,’ said I, ‘the example

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of the noble Athenians, and shall sell my castle and spend my wealth in building a ship and presenting it to my native town.'

'And what,' said Bridget, 'will happen to Cuinchy and to me?'

'I shall call the ship after you,' said I.

'Great comfort,' said Bridget, 'that will bring my baby and me!'

'Am I always,' I said, 'to shrink from the sowing because of those two bogies, comfort and wealth, which haunt, like great black rooks, the harvest of my mind? Do you not see,' said I, 'what will happen on the day when I make my presentation to the people among whom I was born? They will stand in dark crowds on the river front, turning their faces after her, as my ship moves down to the sea. And as at length she crosses the bar and disappears in the wine-dark Atlantic Ocean, there will be a shout run among them: "This is the gift of the man to whom the gods sent adventures!"' And I shall indeed be deceived in my fellow townsmen if, returning to their homes, they do not by vote at once determine that you and the little Cuinchy shall be sustained at the public charges all the rest of your lives.'

## THE HOLIDAY

BRIDGET and I were sitting and looking out through the square window of our dining-room this morning when a railway omnibus went by along the street. It was piled with luggage, and inside it sat two middle-aged women.

'They are going,' said Bridget, 'to the sea,' and the least of sighs betrayed her.

'We are going,' said I, 'to Kensington Gardens. For it is a greater thing that you and I should visit the Round Pond than that these women whom we have just observed should visit the Atlantic Ocean.' And I sent Bridget off to get ready.

Waiting for her in the hall, I watched her come downstairs again. Her face was still disposed to gloom, and I saw that half of her mind at least was on its way to Charing Cross with those two ladies in the pair-horsed bus. But I knew also, by a touch of mischief in the tilt of her three-cornered hat and the provocative

## THE HOLIDAY

air with which she drew her gloves up over her wrists, that the spark of adventure had not been wholly quenched by the sight of those ladies in that conveyance.

‘ You are indeed,’ said she to me, as we turned from our garden gate and walked in and out of the shadows of the plane-trees along the sunny pavement—‘ you are indeed a hopeless man to have married. You are,’ said she, shaking her head, ‘ far too easily content. Had I but married the husband I deserved, I should have visited in a steam yacht the principal cities of the world. And those that cannot be visited in this manner I should have viewed from the windows of their principal hotels, having reached them on the preceding evening by a *train de luxe*. And instead,’ said she, ‘ because I have married a man without ambition, I am reduced to envying middle-aged ladies on their way to Charing Cross in a pair-horsed omnibus ! ’

‘ Surely, Bridget,’ said I, ‘ you mistake the conveyance of the body for the adventures of the soul ! What do you suppose those two ladies whom you observed travelling in a pair-horsed omnibus to Charing Cross will see, when they arrive at their destination and look out from

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their lodging-house upon the vista spread for their delight ? I will tell you,' said I, ' what they will see. In front of their windows will be a road, upon which a certain number of people will be proceeding on bicycles. Beyond the road will be a promenade paved with asphalt, on which a certain other number of people will be proceeding on foot or possibly in Bath chairs. Beyond, there will be a piece of beach, and beyond that again a sea of no particular colour, having waves with white tops, the monotony of which will be partially relieved by the heads of people bathing and the smoke of a steamer on the horizon. I prefer,' said I fiercely, ' those airballs.' For just then we were passing through the gates of Kensington Gardens where the old woman sits with a heap of airballs by her side that duck and bob every time she moves.

' But supposing,' I said, ' you and I, Bridget, were to go to the seaside. Why, first of all, should we not go from King's Cross instead of from that other station, and at King's Cross should we not take tickets for that magic castle which was the country seat of Bebba when King Pepin of France was a little boy ? At least it was in some such period ; but all that, Bridget, was before our time.

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‘Should we not come to a wide country,’ I resumed, ‘where the black rocks of the hill-side break through the green, where white farms and little woods are set in the valleys, where wild geraniums grow by the railway line and pigeons are always waiting to race the trains? Should we not walk at evening on the battlements of that magic castle and look out upon a prospect familiar to our souls?’

By now we had passed up the Broad Walk beyond the well where the children play on a tree that came down in the great storm. We were nearly level with Kensington Palace, and I looked sideways at Bridget. Her forehead was clear at last, and her eyes were looking over the heads of the dogs and the perambulators and the nursemmaids.

‘On our right hand would lie the quiet and steely sea, stretching from an almost black horizon to where in dark and level lines it meets the edge of the sands. At our feet would lie the village, the smoke of its chimneys bent southward by the wind, with that grove of trees at its head which keep their greenness later into the evening than any other kind of tree. But best of all, to northward, would be the dunes patched with rushes, the beach of white sand above high-water

## THE STARRY POOL

mark and of brown sand below. There would be a bar of silver where the stream divides it, and beyond the stream the rocks, and beyond the rocks the lemon-coloured sea, and beyond that pale sea a gap of bright water between the mainland and the fairy island, and last of all the Scottish hills.'

Just then we stepped together across a little railing and came to the Round Pond. Close in front of us the ducks were splashing their wings and quacking, and beyond boats with white sails were racing each other in all directions. 'Let us go,' said I, 'widdershins around this pond; and then let us go back and buy an airball for each of us and another for the little Cuinchy; and, returning home, let us thank the gods that we do not need even a single-horsed omnibus to take us upon our holiday.'

All of which things in turn, for the price of threepence, we did.

## THE CASTLE

‘WE shall have a holiday when peace comes, shan’t we ?’ said Bridget.

We were sitting late one night in the top room of our new house, looking down on the searchlights knitting their beams in and out over London.

‘Perhaps a little one,’ said I.

‘Only a little one ?’ said Bridget. ‘Tell me what it will be like,’ she said.

‘Tell me first where we shall go to for our holiday,’ said I.

‘Shall we make believe,’ said she, ‘to go to that house I told you of once before, when we were sitting by this window—the house where I was to pull aside in the morning the curtains worked with red daisies and look out upon almost all the hills of England ?’

‘It is there,’ said I; ‘assuredly that we will go, you and I and the little Cuinchy our baby and Lightfoot our dog. And one day we will

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spend in the hills, and one day we will pass in the garden, and one day it will rain and we shall stay at home and you will work that tapestry we imagined, that is to be the history of our family from the earliest times and is to show you with your donkey-cart as a little girl and me with my governess as a little boy, and only quite at the end will there be a picture of Cuinchy—at least I am speaking of the opening strip. But the last day of all we shall undoubtedly spend upon the beaches of the sea.

‘Very early that morning Cuinchy our baby and Lightfoot our dog will come in to wake us, with singing and with barking, and almost before the tide has started to run out we shall be going through the garden gate and across the hill to the sands. Lightfoot will be running a little in front of us, with her ears pricked and her tail in the air, looking round at us from time to time; and Cuinchy will be jigging along beside you, swinging her red bucket to and fro with her brown holland pinafore fluttering in the breeze. And when we have passed through the rushes and come out on to the beach, what do you think we shall do first on that the last day of our freedom ? ’

## THE CASTLE

‘Perhaps,’ said Bridget, ‘we shall go in the boat and fish, or it may be we shall paddle; or do you think we should begin by building a castle on the sands?’

‘There is a ritual,’ said I, ‘which those who visit the sea must observe; the which following, we shall begin by searching up and down the beach for pebbles of cornelian. And you first will find a white piece, and then you and Cuinchy together a yellow, and, last of all, after you both have discovered several more, I shall perhaps chance upon a stone of bright and shining red. This I shall hold up against the morning sun to assure myself that it is a true stone and no counterfeit; and having thus provided ourselves with talismans against the whales and sharks of the sea, you and Cuinchy will go off to your tent and I to my retreat in the rushes, to make ourselves ready for swimming. So, presently, we shall all run down the sands together; and first of all Lightfoot, our dog, will stop and bark at the water; and then you and the little Cuinchy will wait for the waves to come and break about your shoulders. But I, being the tallest and bravest of the family, shall plunge through the tumbling water and swim out almost to the horizon and back again, and

## THE STARRY POOL

so return at last to the beach, singing to myself a song about mermaids which there will be no one else to hear.

‘By then it will be time to eat ; and we shall sit drying our hair in the wind and devouring bread and meat and honey and sweet cakes, of which a portion we shall set aside for our dog Lightfoot and a portion for the holy gulls, that will be screaming and fluttering in a flock along the distant margin of the sea. Till at length overcome by the labour of my swimming, I shall, maybe, give myself up to refreshing sleep, the while you and the little Cuinchy will sit upon a rock and tell each other stories. But when I awake, and your tales are ended, we shall take each of us a spade, and with great discussion we shall mark out upon the sand the design of a castle ; and next will set to in the wind and sun and dig—I with my great spade of iron and Cuinchy with her little spade of wood, and you with your spade that will be neither little nor great. And whether we stop to take tea or whether we continue digging without respite, certain it is that about sunset we shall rest upon our spades and eye our handiwork and say : “Never, surely, upon all these sands was built a nobler castle than this !” Nor will there

## THE CASTLE

be anyone, except it be the holy gulls, to contradict our boast.

‘ And when twilight comes, and all the winds have fallen, we will set up on our castle for each of our true friends lost in the war a candle, ten candles in all; and then we will withdraw a little into the dusk, and sit upon the beach and rest our chins upon our hands, watching the small flames of those candles in the darkness and listening to the noise of the approaching sea.

‘ And as one by one those candle lights are quenched we will speak in turn of the dead whom they commemorate, praising this one for his knowledge and that one for his stories, this one for his virtue and that for his strength. And when the last candle has flickered and gone out, we will sit a while in silence, remembering that host of nameless and innumerable men whose spirits, like those candle flames, have vanished into the night. Till as we sit, watching the dark sands and the pale expanse of the sky, we see suddenly in front of us the white edge of the tide creeping up to our castle, and rise, and turning homeward give thanks each in his own heart for that, long desired and long delaying, at last peace. . . . ’

## THE STARRY POOL

But at that moment Bridget broke short my story, as I told it at the window of that top room looking out over London. She clutched my arm and she leaned forward to the windowsill, and :

‘ Listen ! ’ she said, and again :

‘ Listen ! . . . Listen ! . . . ’

There passed in the street beneath us the tramp of armed men.

## THE CLUB

‘TELL me a story,’ said Bridget.

‘What about?’ said I.

‘Anything in the world,’ said she.

‘I will tell you a story about a club,’ said I.

‘That will be a dull story,’ said Bridget, pouting; ‘all about plate-glass windows, and behind each window a head, and in front of each head a newspaper.’

‘It will not be a dull story,’ said I. ‘Some clubs, no doubt, would make a less interesting tale than mine—as, for example, clubs, such as I have heard of, whose members are united only in their zeal for bicycling or for the raising of canaries. But no one could make a dull story out of such a club as mine, whose members are united by no love of machinery or birds, but are in their hearts amalgamated for the pursuit and capture of truth.’

‘I wish you would tell me a story about the sea,’ said Bridget. ‘You used to tell me such

## THE STARRY POOL

good stories before we were married—all about hills and gardens and foreign parts. But now you are always talking about houses and children and truth.'

'To-morrow,' said I, 'perhaps you shall hear how once I caught a phantom mackerel, greater and more silvery than mortal fish, off the coast of Yorkshire on a summer night; how it lay for a moment on the rock in front of me, all pale and struggling in the darkness; and then with a leap broke and divided the water, and so returned scatheless to its deep and magic home. But to-night I am determined to tell you a story of my club.'

'And first let me explain, Bridget, that when I speak of my club I am not thinking of its material advantages—of the nobility of its marble, the width of its carpets, the variety of its dishes, or the redness of its wines. For these things are but the natural outcome of a subscription such as ours of several guineas. I am reflecting rather on the things of the spirit, recalling how the clubmen are joined together, like the men of that ancient city, in a constant desire to see or hear always some new thing. For which reason—so they tell me—they pass the morning in a busy examination of the news, from time

## THE CLUB

to time withdrawing apart to devise schemes for the better salvation of their country, nor less to water with fruitful criticism the plans of smaller men.

' But of the earlier part of the day I can only speak by hearsay, and will now describe to you the evening-time ; for of that I tell from experience of my own. Often of a late afternoon passing through the great doors I walk slowly up the well-carpeted staircase, thinking at every step what wonderful men my fellow clubmen are and how much less interesting and remarkable than they am I. So I enter modestly into the smoking-room and sit down in the corner, and read some newspaper or story in silence to myself. And at length when the clubmen have tired the sun with their discussions, the nimble servants bring candles and set them upon the tables, and other servants—their fellows—draw the great curtains across the plate-glass windows you have mentioned, in token that even to the sharpest contest and the longest story at length must come an end. And when the curtains are drawn and the candles lit the clubmen sit down in companies of four and throw down the cards upon the table. And this they do in memory of their childhood. And yet they

## THE STARRY POOL

are not thinking of those cards or those candles or of each other, but all the while their thoughts are of their wives and of their children, who somewhere await their return. And one, casting down the queen of spades in front of him on the table, will say that the game is his, and will praise the excellence of his wife, for that she stays at home, and is not largely talked of. And another, gathering up the knave of clubs with other cards, will speak of his children, praising the eldest for his strength, and the second for his cunning, and the third for her speech, and the fourth that he is a baby whose strength and cunning and speech will surely surpass them all. And when they talk of these things, I can no longer hold my peace ; but rising from my corner I approach them and I say :

“ You speak, indeed, my fellow clubmen, of that you know ; nor would it be fitting for me to challenge the promise of your children or the qualities of your wives. Yet it would ill become me not to point out that you know neither my wife Bridget, nor my baby Cuinchy, nor my nurse Nanny. For my wife Bridget exceeds your wives in beauty and in cleverness, and my baby Cuinchy exceeds your babies in strength and in cunning and in speech, and

## THE CLUB

my nurse Nanny surpasses your nurses in neatness and niceness and everything else."

' And then, having supported my claim with perchance an anecdote or two, I turn and pass back again through the great glass doors, and, descending the well-carpeted stairs, tell over for every marble step a virtue of my wife or an excellence of my child. And when I reach the hall, the footmen nudge each other as I pass out into the street and whisper together and say : " It is evident that this man has a good nurse and a good child and a good wife ; for there is no one walks down the stairs so majestically as he." But meantime those others, my fellow clubmen, sit on round their table in silence, till one of them, nodding his head backwards and forwards, will say, " That man has a better wife and a better child and a better nurse than ours." Whereupon they all, nodding their heads, return in silence abashed to their homes.'

' Is that a true story ? ' said Bridget.

' It is,' said I, ' completely false.'

## THE RICH CHILD

As Bridget and I turned into Kensington Gardens, we found ourselves walking behind two nurses, a little boy, and a perambulator. The nurses were smartly dressed in grey; the brass fittings of the perambulator shone in the sun. But it was the little boy who chiefly attracted our attention, by the elaboration of his childish dress, the careful tilt of his three-cornered hat, and the immaculate whiteness of his gaitered legs.

‘My children will never be dressed like that!’ said Bridget tragically.

‘There,’ said I, ‘but for the grace of God, goes our little Cuinchy.’

‘Your ideas are so lowly,’ said Bridget. ‘You would be perfectly happy for the future of your family even though I, as a widow, were singing outside public-houses with Cuinchy in my arms to collect the pennies. You never look ahead nor reflect upon the advantages

## THE RICH CHILD

which this little boy in the white gaiters will most certainly enjoy, but of which our little Cuinchy will—all too surely I know it—be increasingly deprived.'

'I beg you to picture them to me,' I said.

'It is difficult,' said Bridget, 'to make a list of such things in Kensington Gardens, where dogs are always running about among the trees in a manner most distracting to the mind. But undoubtedly that little boy ahead of us will from his earliest days have lessons in French from a lady from Paris, and lessons in dancing from an Italian professor, and lessons in playing upon the fiddle from some great master fetched from Poland or Scandinavia. And later on the wisest of men alive will instruct him in Latin and in Greek, and will lecture him upon the tongues and the sciences and the politics of the ancients. This,' said Bridget, 'is but a sketch of the advantages which he will enjoy; and their results I would have described in great detail, were it not for the boats sailing about the Round Pond in all directions in a manner most confusing to the soul.'

'Let me finish,' said I, 'your history for you. It may be that he will not appear at the time to profit much by his French and Italian

## THE STARRY POOL

and Polish instructors. It may be that those wisest of living men will manifest some disappointment at the meagreness of the fruits which their lectures seem to bear. But it is, nevertheless, by no means impossible that, when he shall have grown up and come to be a man, that little boy will be thought well fitted not only by his wealth, his dress, and his deportment, but also by the fluency of his language and the adaptability of his philosophy to take a prominent part in the governance of those who can but recognise their birth and their experience to be of a different and less qualifying kind.

'But I pray,' said I, 'that our Cuinchy may grow up differently from that. I wish that she may be a lover of all bright and living things, and that the hearts of men and women may be open to her. I wish, indeed, that she may dance and sing and be a notable speaker of the English tongue. And I hope that, when the candles are lit for her departing, the angels, as in that old story, once more will walk upon the walls of heaven, as sentinels to warn the immortal souls for her entertainment. More than that I dare not pray, because it is difficult in Kensington Gardens, when the children are always running backwards and forwards to their

## THE RICH CHILD

nurses, to give a true picture of one's heart's desire ; and, again, who am I, that I should plan out in advance the moulding and forging and manufacture of a soul ?

' And as for that little white-gaitered boy,' said I, ' notwithstanding his advantages and notwithstanding the possible success which I have outlined for him, I fear, Bridget—indeed, I greatly fear. It may be that, in spite of everything, he will yet by the magic of his nature possess his soul in quietness, and regret sometimes in the years of his manhood that he was never allowed, like other children, to find his own way through the thorns and briars of this troublesome world. It may even be granted him, in the changes and chances of life, to make some return not wholly disproportionate to the wealth and care which will have been lavished upon him. And yet when I recall to my mind the fate of other boys I knew, who, when they were young, walked these same paths of Kensington Gardens in three-cornered hats and white gaiters, I tremble, remembering in how many cases their parents, mournfully enumerating the attainments of their teachers and regrettfully describing the values of their costumes, have, nevertheless, at the last despairingly

## THE STARRY POOL

laid their goatish dispositions to the charge of a star.'

As I finished this discourse we found ourselves by the playground close to Kensington Palace, where the children hold their revels. Six of them were running top speed round the pole which has the ropes tied to it, and just as we stood by the railings to watch them they raced up into the air, their gay-coloured pinafores quivering in the wind, their bodies curving and swaying in a bright maypole dance. We were enchanted at the sight of them, and Bridget clapped her hands for joy as at length their dance grew slower and their feet came down to earth. The little white-gaitered boy had been watching them, too. For when we started again upon our walk, there he was ahead of us, tugging reluctantly at his nurse's hand and gazing backward at the children in the playground. But as he walked thus, looking over his shoulder, we saw how he stepped unawares into a puddle, so that the black water spurted up about his legs and spoiled the whiteness of his gaiters. Whereat his nurse loudly reproached him, and Bridget and I, she not wholly mournful and I with great cheerfulness, turned aside and walked home again along another path.

## THE PENNIES

SEARCHING the drawers of my writing-table one evening, Bridget came across a money-bag and looked into its neck.

‘What is this bag of black pennies?’ said Bridget, jingling them together.

‘Aha!’ said I mysteriously; for this was a secret bag which I had not meant her to find.

‘Are these the savings of our lifetime?’ said she.

‘It would take long to explain,’ said I, ‘since before I could make clear the full meaning of those pennies it would be necessary for me to relate completely the life history of the father of our cook. And he,’ said I, ‘is a man of nearly eighty summers.’

‘What new moonshine is this?’ said Bridget.

‘No moonshine at all,’ said I. ‘Perhaps you are not aware,’ I said, ‘that our cook is

## THE STARRY POOL

not the least among fifteen beautiful brothers and sisters.'

'All honour to her mother,' said Bridget; 'and yet were she the twentieth daughter of a twentieth son I cannot see the connection between her ancestry and these coins.'

I saw that there was no keeping my secret any longer, and therefore, with a good grace, I launched out into a tale.

'On an evening,' said I, 'of last October, my holiday being then ended, I took a hatchet into our cellar and began to break up a packing-case for the better lighting of our fires; and Cook, as is her wont, stood by to encourage me with conversation as I chopped.

'To think, Cook,' said I, sticking my hatchet into the wood and splitting it apart—'to think that only yesterday I was surveying the world in the hilly county of Dorset! I was marching, Cook, in a high and windy country, and far away below me the fields were like little squares. In Dorsetshire,' said I, 'the gulls and the partridges mingle; and if you ask for any other sign of its beauty and its nobility, let me tell you that a man earns less there by toiling in the fields than in any other part of England whatsoever. And this, the farmers say, is but just,

## THE PENNIES

since in no other country are so much nobility and beauty added without charge to the wages of a labouring man. Such is the country where but yesterday I was marching free and alone ; and now, to-night, here am I, chopping this wood in this cellar.'

"But I know," said Cook, "that country well, for among its hills both I was born and my fourteen beautiful brothers and sisters, and among its hills dwell still my father and my mother. Each of them is seventy-five, and yet if you were to call at the old maltster's house, where now they live, you would find them still joking together and the skin upon their faces still fresh and but little wrinkled. When my father was eight he went to the bird-scaring, and before he was twenty he was apprenticed to a blacksmith and married to my mother, and before he was twenty-one he had ceased to be a blacksmith and had taken to divining water with a black bramble from the hedge. And now that he is seventy-five, you could not count on the fingers of his fifteen children all the wells that he has discovered in the country where he was born.

"Once a year he would go Salisbury way for the harvest, and for two months he would

## THE STARRY POOL

be gone ; and when he came back, all of us that were his children would go down to the station to meet him. He had no favourites among us, and for each he would bring back, bought out of the harvest money, a new pair of boots and a bag of sweets or a toy. Those boots were our Sunday boots until the next harvest, and skipping-ropes were not allowed in our family, for fear the soles should be worn out before the autumn came. Yet so good were the shoes men made when I was young, that my mother never noticed they were worn, though we made ourselves skipping-ropes of brambles from the hedges and swung them for each other when there was no one else to see. A hundred chickens my father had, and plentiful pigs and ducks ; and my mother made loaves of bread so big that you must stand them on the centre of the kitchen table or else they would have overbalanced and fallen to the floor. So great was the fame of them that a foreign man once walked all the way from Switzerland, partly to make a marriage with one of my father's beautiful daughters and partly also in the hope of a slice of my mother's beautiful bread.”

‘ That was the story Cook told me, Bridget, as I chopped that wood in that cellar, and I

## THE PENNIES

pondered over it as I went to work across Kensington Gardens next morning. "Here am I," I thought, "in a black coat and a black hat, and here is Kensington Gardens, where the railings," said I, striking them with my black umbrella, "are blacker than the seats, and the trees even blacker than the railings. I shall never be living in a maltster's house, and Bridget will never be making loaves as large as the kitchen table for fifteen beautiful sons and daughters. I shall never escape all my days from this town of black coats and black pennies. Yet if black coats are wholly bad, at least black pennies have their uses. I will make a use of them," said I to myself. "I will give up, at least in part, the baneful habit of smoking, and all the other habits which prevent a man from having in his kitchen loaves as big as the kitchen table. I will turn my tobacco into pennies, and the pennies I will place in a bag, and with that bagful one day a son of mine shall buy a maltster's house in the country; and there he shall live with a hundred chickens and plentiful pigs and ducks. The loaves in his kitchen shall be so big that they must stand in the centre of the table. Fifteen," said I, "at least fifteen, will be the

## THE STARRY POOL

number of his beautiful children, and they shall be the best skippers in Dorsetshire with brambles taken from the hedge.”’

By now Bridget’s eyes were as large as plates with thinking, and she was looking at the pennies in her lap as though they were magical things. I took the bag from her, and slipped back the pennies one by one. There were twenty of them in all, and I tied up the neck of the bag with string to guard against their escape. It fell into the drawer with a solid thump.

‘ Moonshine indeed ! ’ said I to Bridget. But Bridget’s eyes were still as big as saucers and her thoughts far away.

## PEASEBLOSSOM

BRIDGET sat in the nursery, stitching away at a tiny garment and singing a song of her own invention, which begins like this :

Peaseblossom, Peaseblossom,  
Your coats are so small;  
I wonder, I wonder  
You can wear them at all.

‘Perhaps,’ said I, ‘it will be a boy leprechaun and not Peaseblossom at all.’

‘I would it might,’ said Bridget; ‘but I know by my dreams it will be Peaseblossom.’

‘There are dreams,’ I said, ‘that come through ivory gates and dreams through gates of horn; and I cannot tell of which sort these dreams of yours may be. Yet, even if they be true visions of the night, for myself I am well content that it should be no little boy leprechaun but Peaseblossom and a girl.’

‘I would it might be a leprechaun,’ said Bridget, ‘for we have need of men. And I

## THE STARRY POOL

know that other women will point a finger of scorn at me and my lovely Cuinchy and my little Peaseblossom.'

And with that Bridget bent over her work again and whispered to herself another verse of her sewing song. I think it was a private verse of her own which she had never meant me to hear; but she was absorbed in her thoughts, and seemed to forget that I was in the room.

Peaseblossom, Peaseblossom,  
I prayed in my joy  
To the Mother of Heaven  
For a boy, for a boy.

Peaseblossom, Peaseblossom,  
She sent you instead,  
Oh I wish . . .

'Stay!' said I. 'Stay, lest you sing something beyond recall.' And there fell a silence between us.

'Though the war should last seven years,' said I, 'and the bones of all of us that have been soldiers should lie bleaching in France, yet on that evening when Peaseblossom in her silver dress bends down to light the twentieth candle on her birthday cake there will be as many lads again as maidens in England to knock

## PEASEBLOSSOM

upon the door and ask that they may join in the dancing.'

'Either that is political economy,' said Bridget, 'or else it is only comfort. And though you talked in that strain all day and all night, yet you would not persuade me. For is not my own heart telling me that this is a time for the bearing of men?'

'Do you remember,' said I, 'when the little Cuinchy was still a baby unborn?'

'I remember,' said Bridget.

'I remember, too,' said I. 'I remember a winter's morning when I and a hundred other sons of men were out in the barrack yard before dawn. There we stood in two straight lines, and our commanding officer made us a speech, saying that, whatever befell, we must be worthy of the regiment whose star we bore in our caps. And then, marching to the noble tune of "Let Erin remember," we passed out of the barrack gate. The guard saluted, and we saluted the guard. The slanting snow fell about us as we marched through the town. You could hardly hear the tramping of our feet. You could hardly see through the driving flakes how women and children flung open their windows for a moment to the cold wind, thrusting forth flags in token of

## THE STARRY POOL

their courage and in happy words calling out to us their farewell. But they closed their windows again upon the snowy morning, and we marched on down the hill to the sound of "St. Patrick's Day." And soon our train was passing out of the station and the band was left behind us, playing a tune about the forgetting of old acquaintance that would move even an Englishman's heart. All that day we journeyed in the train, and all that night our ship forged through the fog, and England went down behind us in clouds and snowy darkness. And of what happened afterwards I will not tell you the story; but you know as well as I how many of those hundred lads will ever again hear the bugles sounding "Lights out!" on the barrack square. Do you think,' said I, 'it counts for nothing in my heart and in my soul that I marched away that snowy morning? Do you suppose that I have forgotten how many men that once I knew now lie dead and their homes empty? Every night, when the candles are put out, I see them. And yet, though I stood not thirty days since by the notable wishing-well of Upway in Dorsetshire, and said many a prayer above the clear bubbling water, not once amid all the important wishes of my heart did

## PEASEBLOSSOM

I pray that Peaseblossom should be changed into a leprechaun.'

'What did you wish, then ?' said Bridget.

'That I may not tell you,' said I, 'lest my wish should be defeated. Are there not a thousand prayers in this wicked world for any man to say, but he must needs be wishing his delightful daughters to be changed into sons ? And are there not a thousand sorrows loosed upon the earth that a woman should complain because she bears Peaseblossom instead of a leprechaun ?'

And with that I got up and lit my candle and went downstairs to bolt the door, for it was late. I bolted the door and fastened the chain, and, returning, I trod very softly on the stairs so that Bridget should not hear me. She was singing to herself again as I reached the nursery landing, and I waited, if I might hear the words of her song. Some of it was lost to me, for she sang quietly and low, but I think that I heard the end of it rightly :

Peaseblossom, Peaseblossom,  
You're weak and you're small,  
But I wouldn't exchange you  
After all, after all.

## THE CHRISTENING

WE were coming back from Peaseblossom's christening. The little Cuinchy was sitting on Nanny's knee, looking out of the window at the grey houses wheeling past through the snow; and Peaseblossom, with her bouquet of snowdrops pinned in the front of her robe, was asleep in Bridget's arms, and Bridget and I were talking.

'We must wish something for Peaseblossom,' said Bridget, 'seeing that this is her christening day.'

'What shall we wish?' I said.

'Shall we wish,' said Bridget, 'that our Peaseblossom should be like Helen or like Zenocrate, about whom you were reading to me only the other night—a queen among women? Or is that too ambitious a wish for people like ourselves?'

'There is,' said I, 'no limit to wishes. And it is well for every child that its father and mother once upon a time should have stood upon

## THE CHRISTENING

the edge of the world, like those small figures in Blake's picture, raising a ladder to the moon and crying, "I want ! I want !" And yet,' said I—'and yet I would not have this baby of ours like Zenocrate or even like Helen.'

'Why not ?' said Bridget.

'Those two,' said I, 'were dream-women, and this is not a day for dreams.' And for a while I said no more. 'They were dream-women,' I went on, 'set above the common lot ; and to-day the blood of Europe is warm, and all about us are women that are dreams no longer, and of their number would I have Peaseblossom counted.'

'Alas !' said Bridget, 'for you there are no heroes, but only the common people. And I would wish Peaseblossom to be, if but a little bit, removed from them.'

'Bridget,' said I, 'these are difficult things to talk about, coming home from a christening, while the grey houses go wheeling past amid the falling snow. Yet you are wrong in saying that for me there are no heroes. The world to-day is trodden by heroes ; and I am afraid lest perhaps, becoming like Zenocrate or Helen, Peaseblossom might fail to be enrolled in their company. For what,' said I, 'among all

## THE STARRY POOL

noble gifts is the greatest that a man could desire for his children ? Is it not that they should be able to join like comrades in the adventure upon which all noble hearts are bound ? '

To this Bridget made no answer, but sat looking silently at the evening and the failing snow.

' We have had enough,' said I, ' of those solitary reapers who have bound up the wealth of this world into a harvest for themselves. And what has it profited others, following like rooks behind them in the furrows, to gather up the grains that fell from their reaping ? What need have we to-day of such as those ? Look,' said I, ' at those men limping together along the pavement ; at those women hurrying homeward through the snow from their work ! And how shall you or I dare wish that Peaseblossom should not one day take her place among them ?

' It is but a little while ago,' said I, ' that I was standing with my comrades in the great cathedral. In front was a bier lighted with tapers, and about it stood six sentinels, their hands folded upon their rifles and their heads bowed. A young officer with drawn sword was their leader. About his cap was the silver star and the black braid that are the tokens of our comrade-

## THE CHRISTENING

ship. There were women there, all in black, and behind them, rank upon rank, the men of a great regiment. And why, as the sound of the drums rose and fell, fell and rose, was my heart so moved within me ? It was for thinking of all the comrades, whom that day we held in remembrance, with whom I had worked like brothers and now should work no more. It seemed to me, standing there with head bowed, that of all my life the days I had spent in their company must be accounted the best ; and that because we had lived together like equals, no man seeking anything but the common hope of all. And remembering my thoughts as I stood there, while the voice of the bugles, uplifted in farewell, mounted and broke and scattered into the darkness, I dare not wish for Peaseblossom a fortune separate from her peers.'

Just then we came to our house door ; and first Nanny got out with the little Cuinchy ; and next Bridget kissed Peaseblossom, lying there so sleepily in her arms. And so we vanished silently, one after another, into our house.

## THE LAMPLIGHTER

‘I WONDER when they will light the lamp outside our door again,’ said Bridget.

‘Perhaps when my brother Philip comes home from foreign parts,’ said I.

Bridget was sitting in the nursery arm-chair, putting on one of Peaseblossom’s coats ; and the little Cuinchy was sitting in her small wooden chair, copying her mother and pretending to dress the stuffed doll with a china head which is her adopted baby.

‘What has our lamp got to do with your brother ?’ said Bridget.

‘Who ever heard,’ said I, ‘of a man coming home from foreign parts to the city of London and not a lamp lighted to receive him ? And he, maybe, a man long absent, like my brother, with a monkey on one shoulder and a sack of gold on the other, wandering round the square on a cold winter’s night, and unable to find the house where he was born. I must speak to the lamplighter about this,’ said I.

## THE LAMPLIGHTER

The little Cuinchy looked up from her work as though to reprove me for my interruption, and then, looking down again, continued the toilet of her doll. Bridget, too, looked up, and suspended for a moment her task of tying the strings of a flannel coat across Peaseblossom's little shoulders.

'I have already spoken to the lamplighter most severely,' said she.

'But I shall not speak to him severely,' I said. 'I shall waylay him,' said I, 'one evening when he is passing our house, with his twinkling staff upon his shoulder, and his collar turned up about his ears, and his eyes like glow-worms peeping over his collar. I shall look out of our front door as he comes along, and I shall say to him anxiously :

'"Good evening, lamplighter. Have you seen a man from foreign parts in this neighbourhood, and he a man with a monkey, maybe, perched on one shoulder and a sack of gold slung across the other ? "

'The lamplighter will almost certainly scratch his head and reply that he has seen no such person. Whereupon I shall quickly answer him :

'"Alas, lamplighter, alas ! for it is my

## THE STARRY POOL

brother I was expecting ; and I fear that they may have lost their way in the darkness, he and his monkey and their sack of gold. For the lamp outside our door is unlit and the number of our house invisible. But come in, lamplighter, come in ; for though I have as yet no sack of gold in my house, at least I have a wife and two children and some supper.”

‘ Now, lamplighters, Bridget, like other men, are wont to seek in stories of adventure release for their immortal souls. And at mention of that traveller, that sack, and that animal the lamplighter will first waver and next will stay his footsteps, and at last will turn into the house behind me and shut the door upon the street. And I shall lead him upstairs, with his eyes still like glow-worms looking over the collar of his coat ; and, bringing him into the nursery, I shall introduce him to the little Cuinchy, to Peaseblossom, and to you. So we shall all sit down to supper together. But presently you will stay the clatter of your knife and fork and for a moment will sit still ; and then will run with Peaseblossom to the window, flattening your face against the pane and whispering “ Listen ! Listen ! ”

‘ Whereupon, breaking off from some story

## THE LAMPLIGHTER

about Prester John or the Great Khan, I shall say :

“What did you hear, Bridget, that your face is flattened against the window ?” And you will answer :

“I thought I heard the footsteps of your brother, returning from foreign parts. But alas ! the steps have passed by and I cannot tell if it was he ; for the night outside is full of darkness and the lamp in front of our door unlit.”

‘But when this has happened several times and each time you have returned the same answer, and I, in spite of these interruptions, have at last completed the story of Prester John and the Great Khan, then the lamplighter will take up his staff and will turn up his collar about his ears, and he and you and I and the little Cuinchy will go downstairs all together. It will be a stormy night outside. The plane-trees will be clawing at the sky and the clouds will be flying across heaven like witches in a fright. But before he passes on his way down the street the lamplighter will turn to us, like a man within whom a question has long been stirring, and will ask what we contemplate doing with our sack of gold, if so

## THE STARRY POOL

be that fate and my brother and his monkey should bring it safely to our door. And to this I shall answer :

‘ “ How should any man enumerate, lamplighter, standing on his doorstep on a chilly night, when the plane-trees are clawing at the sky and the clouds are flying across heaven like witches, the possible uses and employment of a thousand pieces of gold ? Some of them, indeed, we shall present to the King, for the confusion of the King’s enemies, and the sustenance of our own old age. But with some, undoubtedly, I shall perform a liturgy, paying to the public treasurer or other trustworthy man as many pieces as will keep this dark lamp for ever and for ever burning in memory that here lived Peaseblossom and Bridget and the little Cuinchy, and that here, too, lived I.”

‘ And with that the lamplighter will turn again and depart down the street in silence, with his eyes like glow-worms gleaming before him and the staff over his shoulder twinkling behind. But you and I and the little Cuinchy, and perhaps also Peaseblossom with her small and reedy note, will send a song of our own invention eddying after him down the black and freezing street :

## THE LAMPLIGHTER

— Lamplighter, lamplighter,  
    Out in the cold,  
If you meet a man  
    With a sack of gold,  
Turn again, lamplighter,  
    Turn back and be sure  
To light up the dark lamp  
    Outside our front door.

As I finished this song and this story, I got up from the fireside and parted the curtains, and looked out again into the darkness of the night. And, whether through some change in the law or because my tale had cast a spell upon the lamplighter, certain, at any rate, it is that the lamp outside our door at length was lit again and burning.

## ECLIPSE

BRIDGET and Nanny and I were sitting round the fireplace in the nursery, watching a few small embers which I had carried under cover of darkness from a neighbour's house. For we had come to the end of our coal. Bridget was knitting a cap for Peaseblossom, and Nanny was playing with the golden plait of her own fine-spun hair, and I was looking into the dying coals and doing nothing at all.

'To think,' said I, 'of all the woods that are in England! To think of my rich cousin's timber, standing in stacks on the Surrey hills, for lack of any man to haul it away, and we here in London with not a twig to keep us warm!'

'I have a plan,' said I suddenly. Bridget, who never believes in my plans, went on steadily with her knitting. Nanny, who knows that my plans are sometimes successful, ceased for a moment the game she was playing with her twisted golden hair; and:

## ECLIPSE

‘Please, sir, what is your plan?’ said Nanny.

‘I will tell you, Nanny,’ said I. ‘Only this morning I saw a cart, all painted with red scrolls on a yellow ground, going past the end of our square. It was just like a country cart, and the horse that drew it like a country horse; for he had a brave frontlet of brass hanging between his eyes, and he walked like a horse that was accustomed to a paddock and not to a London street.’

‘I know that cart,’ said Nanny, ‘for it belongs to the greengrocer; and the greengrocer is a friend of mine, and the cart *is* a country cart, and the horse a country horse.’

‘Then what could be simpler?’ I said. ‘Nanny will go to her friend the greengrocer and will ask for the loan of his cart and horse. And on a Saturday after luncheon the cart will come round to the door; and I shall mount the box with Nanny and the little Cuinchy, and you Bridget, will sit behind on a bundle of straw with Peaseblossom in your lap, to watch if anyone should try to steal our cart. And first we shall christen the horse Eclipse for his encouragement, and then we shall drive all round the square, and the little Cuinchy will crack the whip; and Eclipse, for pride of his new name, will spread

## THE STARRY POOL

out his legs and toss his head till the frontlet between his eyes jingles again.

‘ So we shall take the road for the country ; and all the afternoon we shall trot down a long and dusty road, till the houses give way to trees and the pavements to grass, and we come at last to the Surrey hills and the sun sinks beyond their edge. And when the first stars are visible and it is nearly dark, I shall draw up the reins and cry “ Whoa ! ” to Eclipse, hard by the field whereat Eclipse will dig his forefeet into the short and thymy grass, and, getting down from the box, first I shall tether Eclipse to a tree, rewarding him with a ration of the best corn, and next I shall lift Peaseblossom out of your arms and walk with her up and down the meadow to ensure that she shall not wake, and lastly I shall put her comfortably to sleep in the van, and the little Cuinchy will lie down beside her. For a while, perhaps, we shall sit together on the edge of the great down, our fingers playing with the tufted centaury and our thoughts far away ; for there at our feet league upon league beneath the darkening sky will stretch away to southward the misty counties of England. And how shall we but be thinking, each in his own heart,

## ECLIPSE

of the men who are gone from England and will never see that view again. But soon you and Nanny will steal softly into the van beside our babies, and I shall go off to the great cherry-tree which grows beside that meadow, and there, wrapping myself in a blanket, I shall sleep the dark night through. I shall wake up early in the morning, and without more ado I shall set about loading the cart with wood from my cousin's stack, while you and Peaseblossom will dance in the meadow and Nanny and the little Cuinchy gather twigs for our load. But all the time I shall watch our horse Eclipse, lest perchance he should eat of the red berries of the yew-trees, which long ago the pilgrims planted in that field. For you must know, Bridget, that for a well-bred horse to eat of yew-berries may be death. So at length our cart will be full, and I shall lead Eclipse out of the field on to the common, and there we shall all mount the cart and set off for London, with cracking whip and wheels that grind upon the flints.'

'But this is a very dull story,' said Bridget; 'there are no adventures in it.'

'For that,' said I, 'you should be thankful. I at least have no stomach for adventures among horses, of which all my life I have been most

## THE STARRY POOL

cautious. For I shall not lightly forget that little horse which lay down to rest with me upon her back in the middle of Salisbury Plain, nor that big horse which dreamed one day, when I was riding him, that he was engaged again in a steeplechase, and made off over fenland and moorland, with me still clinging to his back, till at length I persuaded him in constant conversation that an old fir-tree was the winning-post, and that the race indeed was ours. No one, as I said, should seek for adventures among horses. And yet, while I have been talking to you, I have had a presentiment that our return to London will not be free from misadventure. For I suspect, Bridget, that Eclipse, evading my watchfulness and neglecting my warnings, will in reality have eaten of the forbidden fruit of the yew. And I fear that just as we draw near again to London, Eclipse's strength will fail and his eyes grow dim, and he will lay him down in a field by the roadside and will seem indeed to be dead.'

'But whatever will the greengrocer say,' said Nanny, 'if we have to return to London and tell him that Eclipse is dead?'

'Never fear, Nanny,' said I. 'Many years ago in Sussex I learnt a magical spell against

## ECLIPSE

yew-berries, and now indeed it will stand me in good stead. We shall leave Peaseblossom lying on a bundle of straw in the front of the cart, and the rest of us will make a little bonfire in the field. And when it is well lit, you and I and Bridget and the little Cuinchy will dance about it, singing a magical song. "I had a little nut-tree," we shall sing,

and nothing would it bear  
But a silver nutmeg and a golden pear.

At this Eclipse will open one of his eyes and watch us, and Peaseblossom, too, will be peeping out of the straw, like a little hare among the grasses. We shall proceed :

The King of Spain's daughter came to visit me,  
And all was because of my little nut-tree.

By now Eclipse will be risen up upon his knees ; and we, dancing faster and faster round our bonfire, will complete the spell by singing :

I skipped over water, I danced over sea,  
And all the birds in the air couldn't catch me.

Whereat Eclipse will be so excited that he will gallop off round and round the field with thudding hoofs as though all the fowls of heaven were after him, forgetting altogether the yew-berries.

## THE STARRY POOL

which he has eaten and remembering only the nobility of his adopted race.

‘ So we shall start again on our way. And this time you and Peaseblossom, sitting together at the back of the cart, will see the setting of the sun ; and I, sitting in the front of the cart, will gloomily observe the beginning of London. And soon we shall be trotting through the streets, and soon we shall be back again in our square, with our neighbours peeping round their curtains while we unload our wood.

‘ How different, Bridget—how different will that night be from this ! Here to-night is but a handful of clinkers in our grate. But that night there will be six oaken logs at least blazing in our hearth, and the little Cuinchy will sit up late for a treat, and Nanny once again will be plaiting her fine-spun hair till it gleams in the light of that blazing fire. And as the logs first glow red and then fall in white ash between the bars, I will tell you the old and beautiful story of how red and white roses came first into the world. And that,’ said I, ‘ is a better story than this one.’ Whereat we all went shivering to bed.

## THE POTATOES

THE little Cuinchy was tired, and Bridget had issued orders that she was not to run about the nursery. We sat, therefore, she and I, side by side upon the nursery sofa with a green bowl in front of us full of white pinks. The little Cuinchy picked them one by one out of the bowl and tendered each of them first to me and then to Nanny, who was putting on Peaseblossom's nightgown, and last, having smelt each flower herself, put it back carefully into the green bowl.

‘I wish we could grow flowers like that in our garden,’ said Bridget.

‘Undoubtedly,’ said I, ‘we could. I cannot think that there is any flower that would not be proud to grow for a family like ours, and least of all so beautiful and common a flower as this. But we are growing this year a sterner crop than flowers.’ And with that I replaced in the green bowl a pink which the

## THE STARRY POOL

little Cuinchy had by accident let slip on to the floor.

‘I have been wondering,’ said I, ‘what sort of festival we should prepare to celebrate the lifting of our potato crop.’

Now you should know, before this story goes farther, that Bridget and I had set to in the early spring and dug up the small lawn of our garden and the gravel which underlay it; and one evening after dark she and I, by the light of a candle, had planted it with rows of well-sprouted potatoes, she regretting the grass that had been there before and I picturing the crop that was to replace it. And by now I would look out of the window every morning, admiring the long lean stalks of the potatoes which we had planted, and:

‘There,’ I would say, ‘but for the energy and ideas of our family would still be nothing but grass.’

‘Why,’ said Bridget to me, ‘are you always wanting to have festivals? It is not customary for so small a family as ours to have more than one festival. That, at least,’ said Bridget, ‘is what I learn in conversation with our neighbours.’

‘And what,’ said I, ‘do I care for what our

## THE POTATOES

neighbours say ? Are we not the pioneers of this neighbourhood ? Do you suppose,' I said, ' that any of our neighbours had a festival when first they came to live in this square ? Do you suppose that any of them danced "Oranges and Lemons" in honour of their home-coming or went about their house with tapers in procession ? And even if they did,' said I, ' there is not one of them that has a nursery like ours, all carved with bears and mooses and owls and cherubim. And what are tapers and dances without cherubim and without bears ?

' You remind me, Bridget,' I said, ' of an old man whom I saw but yesterday hanging up red lamps on poles across the high road as a warning that none should pass that way. But am I for ever to be debarred from noble action by the cautious warnings of your mind ? I am determined to invent an infinite number of festivals, if not one for every day in the year, at least one for every important landmark in our lives. And what more important occasion have we at this moment in view than the day on which our potato crop is safely gathered home ?

' Now, whom shall we invite to this festival ? ' said I. ' We will not ask our grand relations, for they are ill-suited for rejoicings. We will

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not invite our neighbours, for they have as yet no knowledge of agriculture. Nor will we go out and gather strangers from the street, for this will be a feast for connoisseurs. You shall be there, Bridget, holding Peaseblossom in your arms and leading the little Cuinchy by the hand. And of strangers we will ask but the Square gardener, seeing that he alone believed that potatoes could be grown from our lawn, and the lamplighter, as a reward for kindling the dark lamp outside our front door. Nanny shall be there and Rachel and Lightfoot, our dog, and the robin that lives in the laburnum-tree. And when we have dug up all together the potatoes that have grown upon our lawn, I will make a little mound at the end of our garden, and at length, standing upon it, I will dignify the occasion with a speech.

‘I will begin by telling how once in France I worked for a whole afternoon with an old man and his wife who were ploughing potatoes by the roadside; how I followed their plough, throwing the potatoes into a basket, and was invited by them when evening came to return to their cottage and drink their dark-red wine. I will tell of that priest-ridden man, that Spaniard, with whom once on an autumn morning I dug

## THE POTATOES

potatoes in the mountains till it was time for him to go and ring the bell of the hermitage for Mass. And then—"Friends," I shall say, "we are met together to celebrate a great day in the history of our family. Some of you, it may be, regarding the smallness of our garden and reflecting that the equivalent of this crop might have been bought for a few pence at the green-grocer's, will be inclined to wonder why I have called you together to celebrate so trifling an occasion. But these potatoes which you see on Nanny's plate, small though they be in size and few in number, are greater and more numerous than their parents. And this harvest of to-night is but a token of yet greater harvests to come.

"Only to-day," I shall tell them, "I was watching men in Kensington Gardens launching their toy boats upon the Round Pond ; and for a while I wondered again, as I have often wondered before, what it was that made their eyes shine so strangely as they set the sails of their boats to the wind and commended them to the tumbling and inhospitable waves. But, then, pondering upon life and remembering the evening on which Bridget and I, by the light of a candle, entrusted our few seed potatoes to the mercy of this uncharitable soil, 'These things,' said I to myself,

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‘are a parable.’ I watched those men with eager steps marching round the pond to see if haply some greater argosy than they had launched would sail in to meet them on the other side; and to-night I look at the fruits which the quiet passage of summer has given us in exchange for that evening’s toil. And reflecting on that scene and on this, I remember that the greatest achievements often rise out of the smallest hopes, and that the noblest works of art have birth in no greater thoughts than were ours that evening.”

‘And with that I shall turn towards you and your baby; and, “Citizen Peaseblossom,” I shall say, “you that are the least and the youngest of our company, I bid you mark and remember hereafter what you have seen and heard to-night.”’

‘It may be that before I have ended Peaseblossom will be asleep in your arms. It may be that the little Cuinchy will have run to Nanny to tell her that it is time for supper and for bed. But all our neighbours will be listening to my speech, their elbows leaning upon the garden walls and their chins resting attentively on their hands. And I, anticipating their applause, shall close my speech and descend from my mound, and we shall all return to the house

## THE POTATOES

together, singing some song which I shall invent between now and then, and leaving our neighbours to darkness and surprise. And next year, be sure, all the gardens in our square will be planted with potatoes. Our neighbours, no doubt, will take several candles to their planting, and rear perhaps from them a nobler crop than ours. But though they should all stand upon mounds and make speeches full of long words and classical quotations, not one of them, Bridget, will dare tell you that our festival was held in vain.'

## THE LIGHTS

BRIDGET and Nanny and the children and I, all at the seaside together, were sitting out one evening after tea in the field beside the cottage where they had come for their holiday. Peaseblossom was lying in Bridget's lap, smiling up at her mother as often as she could catch her eye, and the little Cuinchy was wandering to and fro between the white daisies that parted about her small sunburnt face, from time to time exclaiming in words of her own invention upon the discoveries which she was making in that unknown land.

We sat there in the evening sun, talking but little, until first it was Peaseblossom's bedtime, and next it was the little Cuinchy's, and at last Bridget and I were sitting alone in that field on the edge of the sea, watching the grey ships that lay at anchor on the glancing water outside.

Still we sat there in silence, until the sun

## THE LIGHTS

sank down upon the shore, and Bridget turned to me and said :

‘When the war is ended you will be able to spend all your holidays with us, instead of coming to us only for a few days as now.’

‘Who can say?’ said I.

‘But, surely,’ said Bridget, ‘when peace comes it will be all quite different again, like the time before the war, when you and I had just been married and you were not yet a soldier?’

‘I wonder,’ said I. ‘I wonder. Do you remember,’ I said, ‘walking through London that first midsummer night of war? How quickly we thought it would all be over, and how little we realised all that the battle was going to mean? Do you remember how we used to discuss whether I should be sent to France before the fighting was over? And what has happened since? For one thing that we were fighting for in that first autumn there are a hundred things we are fighting for now. For every man who fell in France before that winter evening, when first I saw the flares sailing up across the firing line, there are a thousand fallen now.

‘We speak as though after the war the

## THE STARRY POOL

world would indeed be changed, but yet despite those changes would be the same world that we have known. But who, looking forward into the impenetrable future, can prophesy that the very foundations of the world will not be shaken before we die ? It is easy to say that the war must be won, and that otherwise we shall be traitors to the men who have died. We know in large measure what has to be done to win the war. We must build ships and forge guns ; and those of us who are young and strong enough must sail the ships and fight the guns, while our youth and strength allow. But what of the future ? By what star shall we guide our course when we have cleared the narrow channel of victory, and not we alone but the whole world have to determine where across the landless and uncharted seas our true course lies ?'

Just then from the gloom in front of us a ship began to signal, dotting the darkness of the night with silver flashes quick and slow. And for a while Bridget and I watched her in silence. But when her message was ended :

'There are a million men,' said I, 'and a million fighting that the little Cuinchy may be free to play in that garden among those

## THE LIGHTS

daisies. But they are fighting for a cause of which that is only a symbol, a greater end than they can ever know or we can ever wholly measure or achieve. And on the night when war is finished we shall stand on the very edge of the world, like children peering into the darkness, and no living soul can tell us what lights will answer us back.'

By now all was dark again upon the water, and the breath of a chilling breeze was rising from the sea. Bridget and I got up together, and together we walked back up the narrow path to our cottage. There was a faint square of light at Nanny's window; and both of us, I think, had a picture of the little Cuinchy asleep in her bed behind it, and Peaseblossom lying in her cot with her head resting on her tiny hand. But neither of us spoke again till we had crossed the field through the daisies, that brushed softly against us like ghosts as we walked, and were standing within our cottage door, silent at the foot of the stairs.

## THE FARM

IT is commonly said that every house has some disadvantage about it, and indeed I only know one house upon which this is a manifest libel. You will tell me, of course, that I have forgotten its disadvantages and that I only speak of it like this because the war has stolen my house from me. And yet you will be quite wrong.

It was a farm. I shall not tell you where it was, because I fancy that the rooms I used to live in every Saturday night are empty, and I still hope that some day I shall be able to return to them. But it is not so very far from where a gentleman with three mounted attendants waited one summer morning for Countess Fanny and the Old Buccaneer ; and Tommy Wedger saw a dead body go by afterwards in an open coach, all bloody and mournful, and lived to swear that he had seen a beautiful lady firing and killing men like pigeons and partridges. It was an old farm, too : a Jacobean house, with

## THE FARM

black timbers in the walls and deep black timbers in the ceiling. There was an ingle-nook about the fireplace and a bacon-room in the kitchen chimney ; and up in the roof a great loft, where once, they said, the farm hands had slept, but now in wintry weather the snow came through between the tiles and lay upon the floor. It had its own legends, too. By the front gate was a bay-tree ; and the story went that many years ago two ladies, flying from London, came one night to the farm. They ordered the postillion to shoot the horses and break up the carriage ; and together they buried carriage and horses in a pit under the bay-tree. But justice overtook them, and they were dragged back to London, and no one knew what became of them, but it was said that they were hanged.

You entered the garden by a little green gate ; and if you were staying with me you turned to the right in front of the porch and went round the corner of the house and came upon my sitting-room through an old door-way which I had found in the wall and had opened out again. Down the middle of the room was a long white oaken table, and against the wall in front of you a white oaken dresser, gay with rows of brightly coloured plates. You sat down to the table

## THE STARRY POOL

and drank tea out of cups with a rim of blue and white squares, which I bought one day from an astonished Frenchman who was wheeling them, full of coffee, up and down the platform at Pontarlier. You ate scones off dark-brown plates with a black snake roughly painted upon them. These I carried back to England once from the Spanish side of the Pyrenees, where in every village you may still find a potter with his wheel making them. In front of you on the table there would be a black jug, brought home from Siena by one of the greatest lovers of the farm. In autumn we used to put a branch of spindleberries in it ; and once in spring, I remember, it held a spray of wild apple-blossom that we found lying broken in a ride.

After tea in winter you sat by the fire. But in spring you set off to pick primroses, and in the summer you took a rod and a supply of March Browns and wandered off to catch trout ; and in the autumn you took a basket and went down the hedges picking blackberries. Then you came back to my room for supper, and if you were lucky you shared a bottle of Paradiso from Bologna. In summer, too, you drank your coffee in the garden, sitting in chairs made of green ash that came from Worcestershire, with your feet

## THE FARM

on the rock border among tufts of aubrietia and 'snow of the mountain.' In winter you put a cushion on the pile of fir-cones which I kept in a great earthenware pan on either side of the fire, while I went and fetched a log from the barn and made a blaze.

There were endless things to do on Sunday. The woods came down to the house on one side; the fields ran up to it on the other, and beyond were the commons, stretching out to the pool where the bog-cotton grew in a cloud. A lore and a tradition grew up about the place, which you who were lovers of the farm must partly at least still share with me. I wonder if you remember where the crab-apples were to be found, or would still know how to catch crayfish in the stream? I wonder if you could show me the field where the white centaury grew, or find your way to the phantom tuft of white heather, sometimes to be discovered and sometimes vanished? Could you lead me to the watercress bed in the wood, close by the deserted pheasantry, or to the tunnel in the hill-side where the astronomer sunk his shaft for seeing the stars, and afterwards was found dead and two others with him? No one would live in the house after that, so they pulled it down and built out

## THE STARRY POOL

of its stones a cottage for the old keeper to live in. Probably you remember his birds and his snakes, the flint implements he had picked up on the commons, and the wonderful apples he used to grow. No one ever knew so intimately as he the patches of gorse where the Dartford warblers nested.

You must have snatched some fragment of the tradition of the place if ever you came to stay with me in my farm ; and I have no doubt that at any rate you obeyed the unwritten law by which all guests were bound to accompany me into the woods and gather fir-cones and chips in a sack for the fire. You must have shared with me, too, the bitterness of departure on Sunday evening. We would take up our rucksacks and start grudgingly up the sandy lane. It might be winter, when we carried lanterns, and the frosty ground ‘tinkled like iron’ ; or it might be summer, in the cool of the evening. We came to the ruined cottage, standing close by the stream. The snowdrops still flooded in spring the edges of what once had been its orchard. We passed by the farm, where the puppy always came out to greet me ; over the field that was memorable for the sea of azure blossom that one year it became. We crossed the great high road, along

## THE FARM

which the Countess Fanny escaped, dropped downhill to the pond where the coots would scurry across the water with a splash of startled wings, mounted again through the wood to the house which we still speak of for the wonder of its single roses. For a while now we were on the road, and then again we were crossing the deer park. It was there that a frightened partridge one night flew into a tree as I went by and fell broken-winged at my feet. I picked the little creature up and smoothed it in my hands. But its course was run, and the only kindness I could do it was to give it a swift death. Then we were on the road again, and as the fifth mile passed beneath our swinging feet the station lights came into view.

If you know the story of Countess Fanny and the Old Buccaneer, you may be able to discover my farm. My white oaken table is still there, and I dare say the farmer's wife will give you tea upon it. But if you do not know the story, you are not worthy to know the farm. Therefore I shall not tell you the name of the station.

## THE HILL OF A HUNDRED HARES

ALL day I had walked along the coast of England, and at night I came where an old chapel stood upon a hill. Three grass fields were round about it. In the first were red horses, that grazed upon the pasture with bended heads. In the second were black cows, that looked up from their browsing and watched me silently as I passed by. But in the third was nothing to be seen but here and there a hare, that sat up erect in the grasses, then galloped away, and again stopped and watched me as with slow steps I mounted the hill.

At the top I halted, and rested upon my stick. And first I watched for several minutes the beautiful English sea ; and then I walked round the old chapel, noting the strength of the stones wherewith it was builded to resist the storms of autumn and the everlasting wind. And finally I sat down in front of its

## THE HILL OF A HUNDRED HARES

doorway and began, as is my practice, to line my shoes neatly with fresh dry grass.

When I looked up from this business I was surprised to see that the hares, who had kept their distance from me so long as I was climbing, had now, encouraged by my quietness, come close to where I was sitting, with others their companions, until there was quite a dozen of them gathered round me in a ring. For a minute I looked at them and they looked at me, and then one of them, advancing slightly towards me : ‘We think, sir,’ said she—and I knew at once from the manner of her address that this was a lady hare—‘we think, sir, that you understand the speech of hares ?’

Now this was true, for I learnt their language years ago in Leicestershire ; and therefore I inclined my head in assent, and the hare went on.

‘It is long,’ said she, ‘since anyone visited this chapel who could understand what we said, and my friends here have asked me to tell you of a dispute which has arisen among us, in the hope that you may be able to remove the doubts under which we labour.

‘Welcome,’ said she, ‘to the hill of a hundred hares. For centuries this field has been in-

## THE STARRY POOL

habited by our ancestors, who have always made it their first duty to secure that not less than a hundred hares should regard it as their home. In olden times this was not a difficult matter; and if of recent years the sport of men and the attacks of vermin have made the task of our family less easy than of yore, still we may claim that, amid growing obstacles to the fulfilment of our inherited duty, we have not shown ourselves unequal to the obligations of our descent.'

At this point I gravely inclined my head, and the hares in front of me acknowledged the compliment by bowing in chorus.

'It is,' she said, 'the war which has caused our present embarrassment. To our brothers, the red horses, and our sisters, the black cows, it presented no difficulty. The former are greatly sought after as beasts of draught, and the latter are able to produce both meat and drink for the armies. For both there is but little choice as to how they can best serve their country. But for us who are but hares it is difficult to know whether our best service is to follow in the way of our fathers, contented if we maintain the numbers of those who look to this hill as their home, or whether we can-

## THE HILL OF A HUNDRED HARES

not discover some new and special service which we may render to our country, even at the price of neglecting our hereditary task.

' Between these two views,' the hare went on, ' my friends, whom you see in a ring about you, are divided. There are some, and their number has lately increased, who maintain that it behoves us, now in the time of this war, to throw aside our hare-like duties and perfections, to leave this hill, and to seek in the towns, and perhaps even overseas, work that shall immediately contribute to victory. It is true that this party does not profess to describe what work hares thus migrating could suitably perform. But, when questioned on this point, they ask in reply how they can in reason be expected to describe occupations which they cannot even discover until they have left us and gone travelling in the world. And to this retort those that are of a different persuasion always find it hard to make a sufficient reply.

' Now the contrary party, as I have already told you, point out that they are not strong enough, like those red horses grazing below you with bended necks, to become beasts of draught, nor able, like those black cows who ceased from their grazing as you passed through their

## THE STARRY POOL

midst, to provide meat and drink for the armies. "Therefore," say they, "it is our clear duty to stay in this field." And in support of this main contention they quote the practice of the monks who once lived in the abbey of which there remain now but the ruined tower, which you see below you, and the great tithe-barn a little beyond it. For our mothers and our grandmothers have told us that, when of old wars came, the monks, after much discussion, decided that it was their duty to stay where they were, but to redouble their charities to the poor and their prayers for those who fought by land and sea for them. In pursuance of which purpose not a day passed but they brought gladness to the heart of some poor family in this countryside, while every night and every morning they mounted this hill in procession ; nor could all the storms of winter divert them even once from their resolution. And it is said that the lighted windows of this chapel, while those old monks were busy at their prayers within, on more than one dark night brought consolation, and even security, to sailors out at sea.

"Let us stay, therefore," say the smaller party, "in this field. Let us look to it, even

## THE HILL OF A HUNDRED HARES

more anxiously than in bygone years, that we are not lessened in our numbers nor weakened in the traditions of our race. If there is no charity that we can do to the people in the village, we can at least take special care not to injure their gardens nor their crops." And they hope that the natural gaiety of their frisking and galloping may perchance, unknown to themselves, bring comfort to some passer-by, mournful and wearied with the war, or to a soldier wounded in battle, such as we venture, from your limping, to judge that you may be.

'This is the argument of our minority, whose leader,' she said, 'is Phyllis,' and she indicated a hare sitting on my right hand, whom I had noticed as the liveliest of them all in my slow ascent of the hill. 'It is,' she said, 'as you will see for yourself, not an easy question to decide. But, while we expect that you will wish to sleep upon the matter, we hope that before you leave the village in the morning you will be able to give us an opinion upon our difficulty.'

With this the hare bowed and returned to her place in the circle, from which she had slightly advanced in the excitement of her speech; and I explained in reply, using the language of the hares, that I appreciated fully the strength

## THE STARRY POOL

of their arguments and the difficulty of their problem, and could certainly not commit myself without prolonged sleep to the support of either one party or the other. I promised them, however, that if on the morrow morning any conclusion had formed itself in my mind, I would step up to their hill on my way out of the village, and would tell them how, after my night's rest, the matter presented itself to me. Whereupon the hares thanked me by acclamation ; and, since it was now growing dark, I rose and made my way down the hill. But as I went, following the path through the grasses, Phyllis the hare accompanied me. First she galloped ahead, and next she sat still until I should have caught up with her, and then she danced a measure of which hares alone know the rules. I stopped a moment by the stile to see the end of her delightful dancing, and when she had finished and I had said good night to her, I saw, still nodding with discussion and dark against the evening sky, the pricked ears of that parliament which I had left at the top of the hill. All that evening I thought over their problem, and the dancing of Phyllis the hare threaded in and out among my dreams. But in the morning, not through any ingratitude

## THE HILL OF A HUNDRED HARES

for the confidence which they had reposed in me, but because I am always loth to decide the doubtful problems of other creatures, I slipped out of the village very early, and by a path which could not be seen from the old chapel continued my journey to the west.

## A HERO'S SON

A LITTLE boy was walking slowly with his governess round the dingy gravel path of a London square garden. He was talking eagerly, and she was half listening and half knitting.

'Every time I get a merry-thought,' he was telling her, 'I pull it with Mummy ; and if I win, I wish and wish to meet someone who knows about father. And this morning there was a stranger in my tea, so I thought perhaps someone was really coming this time. Do you think merry-thought wishes ever come true ?'

'I expect they do, if you really and truly believe in them,' said the governess.

The boy gripped her hand a little tighter and shut his eyes and frowned.

'I do believe. I do believe. I do believe,' he said to himself, half out loud.

Yet it didn't seem as though the stranger was coming that day ; for the November evening was closing in about the trees, and the other

## A HERO'S SON

children who generally played in the square had gone home. It was so difficult to keep on believing things, the boy reflected. But at that moment he heard a crackling behind him, and, turning round, caught sight of the thick smoke and yellow flame of a fire at the other end of the garden. He called eagerly to his governess to look ; and she turned her head and then resumed her slow progress along the path, knitting as she went. But the boy was off, scudding across the grass to the little enclosure where the gardener kept his tools and his pots and had his home by day.

He was standing by the fire, bright-eyed and breathless, wondering to what adventure it could best be turned, when the tall figure of a man came through the smoke and stood close by him. The boy saw at once that he was not the gardener, for a helmet rested in the crook of his right arm, and on his left he bore a shield that gleamed dully in the light of the fire, and in his hand was a lance. Evidently this was a soldier.

He bent down, and, looking in the boy's face :

' Do they call you Astyanax ? ' he said.

' No,' said the boy, ' I'm Wilfrid.'

' Have you ever met a boy called Astyanax ? '

## THE STARRY POOL

‘I don’t think so,’ said Wilfrid doubtfully ; ‘but I sometimes play with strange boys in the square, and perhaps I’ve met him that way. When did you lose him ? ’

‘Many years ago I parted from him,’ said the soldier. ‘His nurse carried him in her arms then, and he was afraid of my helmet. But that was by the Scaian Gate, before fire consumed the battlements of Troy.’

‘I don’t think that can have happened in this square,’ said the boy. ‘Perhaps it was the fire made you come and look here. But I know the gardener only puts dead leaves and bits of old geraniums and things like that into this fire, for I helped him sweep them up yesterday.’

‘It was not the fire that brought me,’ said the man. ‘I heard that the son of a hero dwelt in this place, and I came to see if perchance it were the boy whom I called Scamandrius but others Astyanax.’

‘Where do you live ? ’ said Wilfrid ; ‘because if I meet him I’ll tell him you want to see him.’

‘There is a field of lilies,’ said the soldier, ‘where dwell all those who in battle have deserved well of their country. There is my home.’

## A HERO'S SON

'I wonder if my father lives there,' said the boy. 'He's a soldier, too. He was left fighting alone in a trench against the Germans after everyone else had been wounded, and we've never heard of him since. Mummy's been advertising every week in the paper to try and find somebody who knows what happened to him. You see, we've been hoping perhaps he's a prisoner in Germany; but I expect it would be ever so much nicer for him if he were living with you. Do you think he is?'

'I cannot tell,' said the soldier. 'For as the snowflakes which the swift wind, driving the dark clouds, pours thick upon the fruitful earth, so latterly have flocked to the meadows of asphodel the souls of heroic men.'

'When you go back will you find out, please, if my father is there?' said the boy. 'His name's Wilfrid, too, but he's much bigger than I am. You will ask, won't you?' he added eagerly.

But at that moment a sudden draught of wind, swirling round the corner of the gardener's house, blew the smoke between them, and the boy turned away to keep it out of his eyes. When he looked back, he fancied he caught sight for a moment of a plume nodding in the smoke, as

## THE STARRY POOL

though the soldier had donned his helmet. But, though he ran round the fire very quickly, there was nothing to be seen when he got to the other side. And then his governess came to fetch him in to tea. He poured out the story to her, as they shut the garden gate behind them with a clang and went across the road. And he ran upstairs, as soon as the front door was opened, to tell his mother all about it.

'Do you think he'll remember to ask, Mummy?' he inquired anxiously.

That night, as he lay in bed in the dark, trying to get to sleep, he wondered why she had only cried when he asked her that, and had said something about his being excited, and why he had been sent to bed early instead of doing his lessons after tea as usual. And why was it that the soldier hadn't waited to give him the promise he wanted?

With a sudden conviction of guilt he remembered that he oughtn't to have told his governess what he had wished for when he pulled the merry-thought. Of course that was why things had gone wrong. Other little boys, he was sure, didn't find it so difficult not to make mistakes. And he very nearly cried before he fell asleep.

## THE LARK

ALL night he had patrolled the trench, seeing to it that proper steps had been cut into the trench wall for his men to climb out by, that proper gaps had been cut in the wire outside the parapet. Then, just as the first tinge of daylight showed through the fog, they had climbed out, they had passed through the gaps ; and now they had checked for a moment, and, lying silently in the sodden grass between the lines, were awaiting the signal for the last decisive rush.

He had just time to wind a twist of grass between his fingers when it came—the quick successive bursting of a couple of bombs over the German trench. They jumped up and stumbled forward in the foggy darkness. They came suddenly on an old waterlogged trench and floundered across it, on shell-holes torn in the field, on dead bodies lying in the long grass, on derelict rifles and stray ends of wire. Then

## THE STARRY POOL

came the alarm in the trench ahead of them—a shout, flares and wild rapid firing, and almost immediately the slow thump of a German machine-gun. Men began to fall, but he pressed on. Next moment the heavy *chevaux de frise* loomed ahead out of the mist, and, followed by half a dozen men, he hurled himself upon the wire.

For a moment they worked up and down it to right and to left looking for a gap, like hounds at fault for a scent. There was no gap apparent in the darkness, and they turned to the great strands of barbed wire that ran between the crossed posts, seized them with their wire-cutters and wrestled with them, tore at them, cutting and dragging them apart. Meantime the machine-gun was at work close beside them. Men were falling: some of them to crawl back later to their own trenches, others to die where they fell and to lie there probably for weeks—a row of dust-coloured lumps that would soon be drowned in the long, the quickly lengthening grass. A few stragglers came up and joined in the fight against the wire—one with blood all over his face, another with his right leg almost helpless. Every man knew that his only chance of safety lay inside the German trench,

## THE LARK

and they fought with the wire as with a mortal enemy, using their rifles as clubs, hacking at it with their bayonets, even dragging at it with their bare hands. As they struggled there, the machine-gun slowly traversed the ground behind them; and then in a moment they were down, stricken like grass by a scythe, and lay there, living and dead together—some fallen forward on to the wire itself, others at the foot of the great posts. For himself, it felt as though an iron bar had struck him across both ankles at once. He fell back, and half struggled, half tumbled into a great shell-hole just behind him, and there his senses left him.

He had no idea how long he lay unconscious, but when he came to there was sunlight everywhere. His first thought was that he must be back at the wire again. What hard luck it was to be wounded just as he was getting through! He tried to move, but he could do nothing with his left arm, and his legs seemed to be dead. He looked down and saw that there was blood soaking through his breeches and putties. It was his own blood, he supposed. He could hear German shells whistling over and crashing down among the trenches behind him, searching, no doubt, he thought to himself, for their supports.

## THE STARRY POOL

And then again he sank to unconsciousness and dreams.

All the German guns had opened now, and were raining shells on the trenches behind him, and on the ground beyond that again. The English guns were angrily at work, too ; and somewhere to his left a '75' was grinding along the German trenches—crunch, crunch, crunch. But of all this he knew nothing. He was a little boy again, out for a walk with his nurse in Kensington Gardens, and wondering, as he shovelled up the fallen chestnut-flowers into a heap with his racket, whether the park-keeper would mind, if he saw him. And presently he was going off from Victoria to his first term at a private school. The train was just starting to glide out of the station, and his mother and father, he knew, were waving to him from the platform, but he daren't look their way, could only sit back in the corner of the saloon carriage and try to repress his tears from the sight of the other boys.

As the afternoon wore on, life came back to him a little more strongly, and he was sensible enough to drag his flask out of his pocket. But before he could open it his consciousness

## THE LARK

flickered off again into the past. This time he was with Peggy, the very earliest Peggy he had known—an eager, vital companion, full of high spirits and challenging talk, half a boy and half a girl, but hardly a woman yet at all. She was wearing a crimson scarf in her hair, and they were walking along a familiar beach with the firm sand under their feet stretching for miles before them and reaching almost as far as the line of white that was the incoming tide on their left.

It was quieter now. The big guns were all silent, but there was a rattle of rapid fire on his right that seemed to be spreading along the line towards him. It was so difficult to distinguish the noise of the firing from the noise of the tide. Peggy seemed to be following, but she mustn't ; it was too deep for her. He would go across and fetch a boat to bring her over. He was dying now, he felt, and the only thing that mattered was to stop her from coming after him into the deep water. Why wouldn't she see him waving ? He fumbled in his pocket for his note-book. They had always been told to put their messages into writing, and perhaps a written note would stop her ; but the book

## THE STARRY POOL

seemed to be stuck there, and he couldn't move it. He had a sort of idea of telephoning—one of his last duties before the attack had been to see that they were ready to run a wire across directly the trench was taken. He fumbled in the ground with his right hand, but he couldn't see the wire anywhere. All he could see was a lark poised overhead, fluttering now and then, and all the time singing, singing. He was utterly weary; nothing, he felt, mattered but this one thing. The lark was getting dimmer and its song fainter; probably it was mounting and would soon be out of sight and hearing altogether. It was the only messenger left him, and he gathered his strength and cried out to it.

'Tell her it's too deep for her. Tell her to go back and I'll fetch a boat.'

With the effort of that shout he fell back unconscious. The lark must have heard it; for he drifted, drifted sideways towards the English lines, and then rose as though to bear the message beyond them. The Germans behind their great *chevaux de frise* heard it too. They threw out five bombs, one after another; and the last of them fell right into the shell-hole where he lay and killed him.

## THE PARTING

SHE slipped out, to go upstairs and get ready, and he was left alone in the familiar room. It was like the night before he first went to school. Then he had wandered round the empty house, burning into his mind a picture of it all, whereabouts to comfort his heart in the dreaded days ahead. And now, feeling just like that small boy straying through the deserted house, he went slowly round the room where he had lived as a man. He sat down on the old chest. Margaret and he had rescued it once upon a time from a stable and brought it home in a farm-cart. There were the great red earthenware pots, full of fir-cones, on either side the fire. There was the little oaken table which they had chosen together from a dingy shop in the town, and carried off into the country, and brought to great honour as Margaret's writing-table. His fishing-rod stood in the corner, with a red spinner still dangling from the gut. Through the dark

## THE STARRY POOL

frame of the window in front of him he could see the red and white tulips standing in gay lines, like peace-time soldiers on parade. And all the time the sound of Margaret's footsteps moving in the room overhead rang like a knell.

He heard the shutting of her door, and went to the foot of the stairs and stood there waiting as she came down. And at sight of her in her grey dress he could only fumble needlessly with the buckle of his soldier's belt and then wait for her to pass by. She went lightly out into the garden, and he, shutting the door behind him, followed her down the little path, along the wallflower border. In the lane she waited, and put her hand gently through his arm, and he felt a shiver run through her body at the familiar clang of the garden gate behind them. As they went down the sandy road, 'Do you remember,' she said, 'that day we came out with a sack to get crab-apples, before we were even lovers, how we ran together down the field for fun ?' And he looked down at the bright threads of water gleaming in the ruts of the lane and did not answer, but spoke instead of a day spent together on the moor, when she had played truant from a friend's home and ridden out to

## THE PARTING

meet him. And thus, each reminding the other, they talked softly of their life together—of days spent skating under a leaden sky, of afternoons of blackberrying, of evenings spent in telling stories over the fire. At every gate, at every turn of the lane, there was something to be remembered ; and as each recollection sprang like a wave from out their common memory its fellows were upon it, pursuing close and flooding it away. Till at length she spoke of a night when they had wandered as lovers hand in hand through the woods, following the moon between the tree-tops. And at that both of them fell silent, like children on a castle of the sands, whom the strength of the rising sea suddenly frightens and they jump from their castle and pass back to some different game far behind.

They were at the top of the lane now ; and, turning, he looked back at the farm which was their home. The great elms stood over it, and the rooks wheeling above them were black against a quiet sky. The evening light was on its windows, and it seemed to be looking at him with friendly and regretful eyes. Almost he called out loud to it in farewell. And then, without a word, they crossed the stile into the

## THE STARRY POOL

larches, and he was counting—counting the primrose-leaves by the footpath, lest the thoughts within him should rise in tears.

Walking through the wood they spoke of what Margaret must do while he was away—how she must bottle the cherries and the plums ; how she must look after the pony and get the roof of the barn mended ; and how Ursula would come and stay later on and keep her company at the farm. And as they talked together, speaking purposely of these trivial things, they came to the edge of the wood, and in front of them was the open moor, and they saw the sandy track, mounting through the heather to the crest of the ridge, where the stunted tree stood like a sentry against the burning sky. By that tree they had agreed to part, and they mounted the hill in silence, slowly and with delaying feet. From somewhere far across the heather came the faint beat of a drum. Beyond it and beyond it the armies of Europe were on the march. But he was conscious only of a movement of her fingers on his arm, and just below the summit of the hill stopped and caught her, and through a hundred kisses whispered a last, intolerable farewell.

## THE PARTING

When first he looked round she was still standing on the crest, the grace of her cut clear against a darkening sky. And it must have been that he wavered in his longing to go back ; for she, as though she read the faltering of his heart, turned swiftly and was gone.

## THE STARRY POOL

WE were walking not long ago, my friend and I, along a London street upon a foggy night, when he said to me suddenly :

‘ By the way, have you heard that Dicky Raeburn is killed ? ’

‘ No ! ’ said I, and caught my breath.

‘ He was supposed, you know,’ said my friend, ‘ to be engaged to Prunella. But they never announced it, and, dear good fellow though he was, I doubt if he had quite enough imagination for her.’

We continued to pick our way in silence along the foggy street, where from time to time the light of a lamp shone dull and aslant upon the pavement. My feet were still upon the London flagstones, but my thoughts were away in Surrey, in a house below the North Downs.

I had walked across from Effingham one

## THE STARRY POOL

Sunday morning, and come by a path through deep bracken to the edge of those wonderful hills. And thence I had dropped down into the valley, and about tea-time walked up to the old manor-house, towards which my way had been directed. My host and his wife were at home, with several week-end guests ; and just as we sat down to tea Dicky Raeburn and Prunella had joined us.

It was the autumn of 1914 then ; and Dick, it appeared, who had got a commission directly the war broke out, was on a week's leave before going out to France. I don't suppose you ever heard of Dick. Prunella you must have heard of. She was famous already for her spirit and her beauty ; and no one who ever saw her can have forgotten her. Certainly I shall not ; who had often heard of her, but saw her for the first time that evening. Dick said little at tea-time ; and afterwards sat in the chimney corner, smoking a pipe and almost silent. But Prunella, bright with the autumn wind, inspired the whole room. After tea the children came downstairs, and she sat on the floor in front of the log fire and put her arms about her knees and told them a fairy tale, half speech and half song, about the hills across which she had been walking. Heaven

## THE STARRY POOL

knows if she had invented it beforehand or whether she made it up as she went. But, grown-ups and children, certainly it held us in thrall until it ended, and we sat a group of silent creatures about her, watching the flicker of the firelight on the burnished sweep of her hair.

Presently, with the spell still upon me, I took my stick and slipped out of the hall into the darkness. It was a warm October evening ; and as I mounted the steep and chalky hill-side, from time to time I stopped and looked back upon the lighted windows of the manor-house. But soon the beech-trees closed in about me, and I followed the track upward through the woods till I reached the brow of the hill. There I turned westward, along a path that crossed my own ; and presently coming upon a small pool, black with the night but sown with reflected stars, threw myself down in the dead leaves by its brink and lay there with my eyes upon the water.

I do not think I slept, but I suppose I must have been dreaming ; for I had certainly lain there half an hour when I was aware of the sound of footfalls upon the leaves, and saw two dark figures standing side by side against the sky on the farther margin of the pool.

## THE STARRY POOL

The low voice of a woman came to me across the water.

‘Dear,’ said she, ‘I am afraid. Shall you and I ever sit round a fire together again?’

‘Prunella,’ said he, ‘look at the golden stars in this pool! All the armies of this world could not wring those stars from that dark water. How, then, should they destroy the delight that is between us two?’

‘I am afraid,’ said she. ‘I am afraid. Tell me, dear, that you won’t be killed.’

‘Once,’ said he, ‘in the Spanish mountains I came upon a field of thistledown that shone like the gold of fairyland in the wind and the sun. There was a grey barn in that field where the upland shepherds dwelt in the summer; but then it was autumn, and there was no one in that magic place but me. You were only a dream, Prunella; and yet to that magic field with you I vowed that I would return. But now you are a living soul; and though the war should last for ten long years, yet, I swear by your deep throat and I swear by your warm lips, a night shall come when I will knock upon your door and call through the darkness “Prunella, Prunella.” And promise me, dear, promise me, by the golden stars in this water,

## THE STARRY POOL

that when you hear that knock and that call you will step out of the candlelight and travel the world with me. Day after day we will journey, till we come to that gleaming field, and then with my own hands I will gather little bushes to make a fire in the barn, and all night long you and I will sit about that fire and tell each other tales. In the morning our fire will be cold and we shall have vanished across the mountains. But for every word of ours there will be a new star in heaven, and for every kiss of ours a new flower upon the earth. The shepherds will return in the summer. At night they will look upwards, their faces pale in the darkness, and wonderingly count together those constellations in the sky. By day they will tell those golden flowers, nodding their heads and saying, "This way have passed true lovers, and by their kisses are these flowers increased." But we shall be voyaging in another part of the world altogether, having need neither of those stars nor of those flowers. For that is the reward of lovers, that they have so much joy to give.'

With that the two dark figures vanished into the darkness, and I was left staring at the pool. And, whether because part of their tale

## THE STARRY POOL

had come true or whether by some accident of the night, there were twice as many stars reflected there as before those lovers came. For a moment I lay and watched them, and then, wondering at that miracle, I passed through a ghostly bank of willow-herb, and went on my way along the downs.

My friend and I were still picking our way along that foggy London street, and still from time to time the light of a lamp shone dull and aslant upon the pavement. He was wondering whether that dead man was worthy of that bright, living woman. But I was thinking of a grey Spanish barn and of a gleaming field of thistledown—the field untrod and the barn untenanted.

‘Poor, poor Prunella !’ said I.

But my friend, who had never heard tell of that barn or of that field, continued his way upon the pavement, answering me not a word.

## THE EXILE

HE finished the milking early, and, after breakfast, taking a fork and a sack upon his shoulder, went up the road to the potato-field. It was a windy morning ; and he watched, as he went, the great clouds that came sailing over the top of the hill, and the grey sheep walking their own narrow paths on the hill-side below the sky. There was a clump of ragged hawthorn-bushes close by where they were passing, deep-red autumn patches upon the wind-swept grass, and somewhere in a field at the bottom of the hill a younger boy than he was whistling over his work.

He undid the gate of the potato-field, carried his sack to where he had finished digging three days before, took off his coat, and began to work. Men had been scarce upon the farm that summer, and there had been no weeding in the field. The withered stalks of the potatoes grew side by side with docks and sorrels, and his fork, as he worked, turned up the knotted couch.

## THE EXILE

He dug from side to side, now and then throwing up a root of potatoes, which he shook out of the earth almost tenderly and threw in front of him into the centre of the patch which he had dug. It was his last day upon the farm, for now he was of an age to be a soldier, and must go off and join the other boys, his companions, who had enlisted before their time. He had stayed when they went : not through any fear of the Germans nor of being killed, for he knew that one had to fight the Germans, and he was not specially afraid of death. But he had dreaded changing the life he knew for the life of the camp, which he had seen more than once on market-days. He shrank from the life of men who never went about alone, who lived in ugly huts without gardens, who must dig trenches or shovel the mud off the roads instead of labouring in the fields, who must drill and exercise by loud commands instead of working in silence, and who seemed to have such infinite time for standing about and doing nothing. All this he dreaded ; and, besides, he loved the farm better than the other boys had done. His mother had pressed him to stay, and the farmer, who was already hard put to it for men, had told him that he had seen the recruiting-officer, and that he wouldn't be

## THE STARRY POOL

taken before his right time, even if he tried to enlist. So he had been glad enough to stay ; but now his time was come.

When the other boys enlisted, they had taken a day's holiday together before they joined up, and had spent it in the seaside town seven miles away. And, when the time came for them to go, friends of theirs from the village had gone down to the station to bid them a noisy good-bye. But he himself had wanted to spend his last day as though it were any other day. He knew that on the morrow there would be for him no popular farewell. To him the ground and the animals had always seemed friendlier and more understanding than the men. And so it was that now he was digging—digging in the potato-field.

At midday he went back to the cottage for dinner ; but in the afternoon he returned to his work. He had set himself to dig down the field to where a wild rose-tree in the hedge was scarlet with hips. The flock of turkeys from the barn-yard came up into the field to join him, and a robin followed down the strip that he was digging, hopping in and out among the potatoes that lay drying on the top of the ground.

So he worked on till he found himself digging

## THE EXILE

level with the scarlet berries of the rose-tree ; and at that he rested on his fork, looking at the remainder of the field, which no man would dig now that he was going, but which would be turned up roughly by the plough instead. Then he drove his fork into the ground and went back over the strip which he had dug, collecting the potatoes into the sacks. And these he set side by side against the gate where the cart could come and fetch them ; and with that he put on his coat and, with his fork over his shoulder, went down the lane to the farm. And he put away his fork into the shed, and then, since there was no milking for him that evening, he passed out through the farm gate down the track that led to the sea.

There was no one else in the cove. The tall chalk cliffs, flecked with green, loomed and towered behind him. They were friendly, for they withstood the sea. So were the round pebbles, white chalk and black stone, that he caught up in handfuls and filtered through his fingers. For they too had resisted the tides, and this evening he forbore to hurl them back into the water. To-night the sea was the enemy. Close below him its waves came thrusting up the beach : dull green waves, that rose up all veined

## THE STARRY POOL

and marbled with white, and crashed down on the shingle and spread in foam upon the stones ; and there upon the stones halted, and then with a shudder of disappointment were dragged again, reluctant, back into the supporting sea. For a long time he sat and watched the water. But at last he chose a round pebble of white chalk, and hurled it as far as he could in ducks and drakes across the top of the waves ; and, as it disappeared, he turned and walked back across the noisy shingle and again took the road for the farm.

The rustling hedges on his either hand were clouded with traveller's-joy. Up in the wind five old rooks were having a game together. He watched them till they scattered suddenly into the air. Up on the hill-top the cattle were dark against the sky. As he came to the farm gate he heard the distressed, uneasy lowing of the cow, whose calf they had taken from her that morning. For a moment he leaned on the fence beside the pond. In the north the white sky was heavy with ashen clouds. The leaves of the elm-tree were flickering darkly in the wind. Even the bramble-bush was disturbed by its passing. Tree and bramble and fence were still mirrored in the water. But overhead

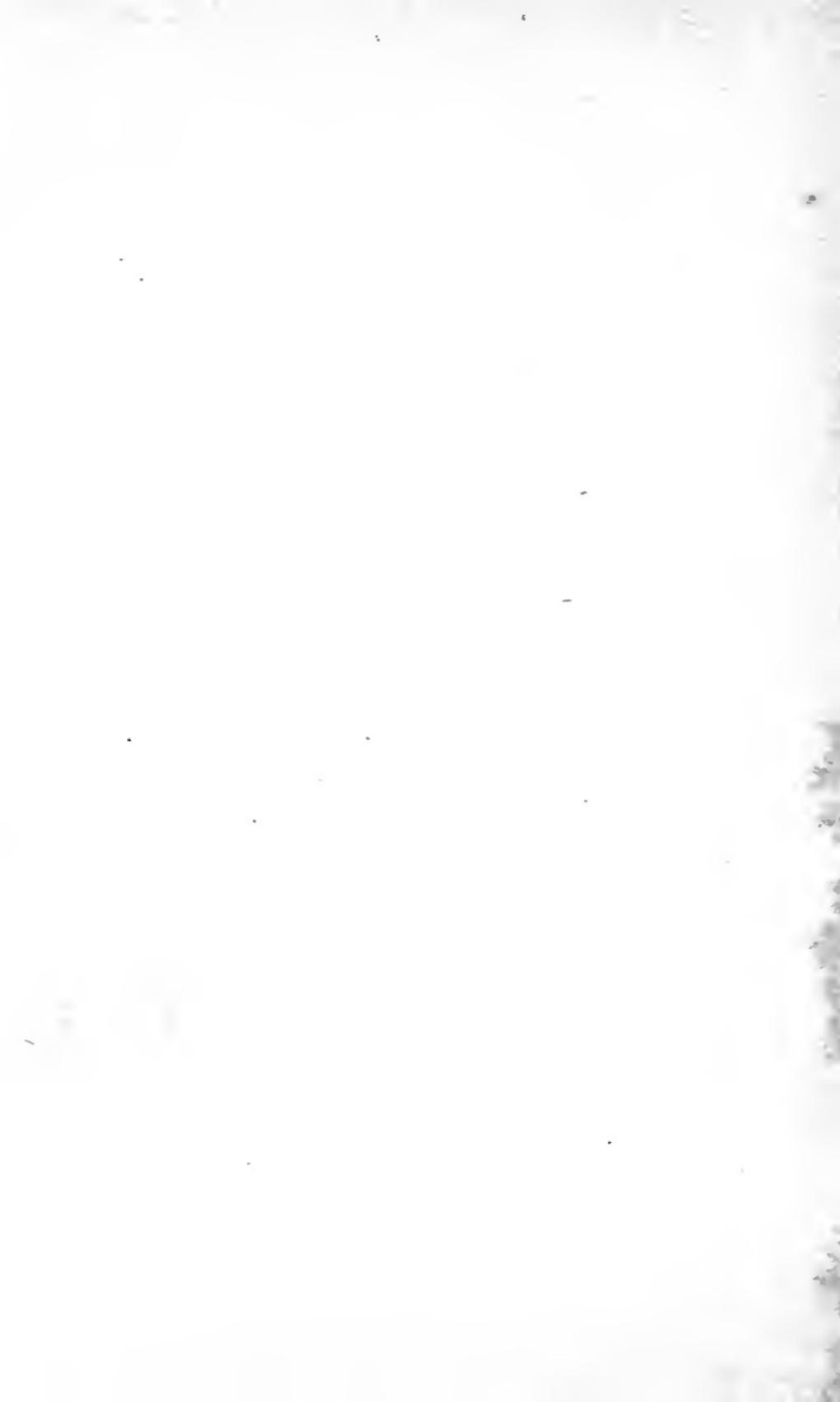
## THE EXILE

the rising and unfriendly wind drove on ; and in the pond, ruffled by its passage and invaded by the deeper reflections of the sky, bramble and fence and tree would soon be pictured no more. Wind, he thought, and darkness brought change ; and change was the enemy. He went into the cottage and shut the door closely on the night.

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